CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Cairngorms National Park Web Portal

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Purpose: To brief the Board about the work that has gone on with partners on the development of a new Web Portal for the National Park. The presentation of this paper has been timed to coincide with the Board paper on Destination Management Organisations as there are inter-relationships between the two sets of issues. A demonstration of the Portal will be available in the margins of the Board meeting (after Planning Committee and at lunchtime, if appropriate).

Recommendations

That the Board:

a) Note the work undertaken with partners to date to prepare a new web Portal that will significantly improve the web presence of the Cairngorms National Park.

Executive Summary

The overall purpose of the web Portal is to make it much easier for prospective visitors to find relevant information about the whole National Park and to ensure they enjoy their visit. This paper sets out how the project has developed, the work done to date and the issues which are being addressed by the dedicated project Steering Group.

The development of a web Portal is vital to the delivery of the Park Plan and is a key part of the Priority for Action on 'Raising Awareness and understanding of the Park' (and also supports the priority on 'Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable'). The Portal-based approach requires a strong degree of collaboration between the public, private and voluntary sectors and fits well with the overall approach taken to the management of the National Park. The design of the Portal is flexible and can be developed over time, adapting to any future changes as necessary. The Portal is likely to be launched after end of September 2008.

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK WEB PORTAL - FOR INFORMATION

Background

1.   There is currently a considerable number and variety of websites providing information about aspects of the Cairngorms National Park. In view of the high priority given in the National Park Plan to raising public awareness of the Park, and the increasing importance of the internet as a source of information, an action was included in the Park Plan to:

"Develop a customer-oriented website about the Park that meets the needs of visitors, residents and others, acting as an entry level portal to other websites." (Action 4a in Priority for Action on Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park)

2.   The Portal will also significantly contribute towards the outcomes in the Priority for Action on Making Tourism and Businesses more Sustainable and, in time, to the other Priorities.

Moving forwards

3.   Dr Jim Hamill of Hamill Associates was commissioned in Autumn 2006 to review existing websites relating to the Park, explore various options and make recommendations on the best way forward. The results of the study were presented to a number of partners through the ViSIT Forum and in bilateral meetings with Destination Management Organisations, Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, VisitScotland (and VisitScotland.com) and others.

4.   In summary, the findings of the study demonstrated that the web presence of the National Park is fragmented, rather confusing and frequently of poor quality. In particular it is difficult for users to find out simple information about aspects of the Park that they would reasonably expect to find easily – where to stay, what to do, when to go, etc. Frequently, the relevant information is there in some way but is structured around different administrative units (local authority boundaries or regions of, for example, Forestry Commission or Scottish Natural Heritage) making it very difficult to appreciate the overall unity of the National Park. While many of the sites have been professionally designed and are updated regularly, some have been developed in a less professional way and contain information which is fairly static, often quite dated, and sometimes inaccurate. Overall, the web presence of the Park compares badly with other destinations elsewhere or with protected areas internationally and is far from what would be expected in a "World Class National Park".

5.   There are relatively few options to improve the situation. The development of a substantial new website with all of the information in one place would theoretically be possible but would involve duplication of the information that is already on existing sites. This would have been expensive, extremely unpopular with partners and, fundamentally, would not have fitted well with the model of National Park we have in the Cairngorms. The only viable option was the development of a modest "Portal" website to direct people to the relevant information and complement it where necessary. The proposal to take that work forwards was presented to the ViSIT Forum early in 2007. A phased approach was recommended, initially working to meet the priority need which was to improve the information available to visitors. This proposal won the backing of all interested parties.

6.   A Steering Group was formed involving interested members from the ViSIT Forum, specifically the two DMOs (in Aviemore and the Cairngorms, and Deeside and the Cairngorms), the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce and VisitScotland with Jim Hamill Associates providing advice and facilitation. As the work progressed the Group was joined by Glenlivet and the Cairngorms (the brand of Tomintoul & Glenlivet Highland Holidays) and Dave Fallows on behalf of the Board. Following a tendering exercise, website designers were appointed and the site is now in an advanced stage of production.

7.   One direct implication of the project is that the existing website (www.cairngorms.co.uk) will become entirely focussed on the work of CNPA. This development has already been taken into account in the recent retendering exercise for management of that site.

The Web Portal in action

8.   The idea of the web 'Portal' is fundamentally quite simple. The overall purpose of the Portal is to make it much easier for visitors and prospective visitors to find the relevant information about the National Park and encourage them to visit. It is essentially a new website, created with its own domain name (www.visitcairngorms.com). The site is modest in size as it only needs to provide basic information, fill gaps in provision and point users onwards through links to other websites.

9.   This Portal based approach has a number of distinct advantages:
        a) *Design based on National Park Brand image* – the Portal has been designed around the brand image, using its associated colours and the strap-lines from the community-based interpretation workshops. This significantly increases public exposure to the brand and provides a great place for visitors to link through to other websites that are already using the brand in

a high profile way, such as Cairngorms Farmers Market, Cairngorms Hostels and Creative Cairngorms.

b) *Supporting Park-wide messages in the context of the Park Plan* – the Portal allows the CNPA to promote Park-wide messages and the strategic aims of the Park. This is extremely important at this stage in the Park's development to help raise the profile of the CNP as a whole and to generate much needed sense of unity for all of the communities which make up the Park.

c) *Flexibility and ease of management* – the Portal approach means that it is not necessary to keep a lot of detailed content (names, addresses, business listings, etc) up to date. Instead, the managers of other websites do that. The Portal can easily be modified to point users towards new sources of information or topical events (e.g. the recent BBC Springwatch programmes).

d) *Provision of public interest information* – at present there is a tendency on some websites to move users quickly to information about commercial products/experiences provided by businesses. While this is perfectly valid and appropriate it can adversely influence the impression given to visitors, ignoring the wide range of opportunities that are available at free or low cost. Such public interest information does not always have direct commercial value but is invaluable for visitors. The Portal can fill this gap by providing information about where to go for a walk/cycle/ride, how the area is managed, public safety, the weather or suggestions for what do on a wet day, etc.

e) *Reinforces the collaborative approach to Park management* – The overall approach, relying on websites managed by a wide range of partners, will reinforce very effectively our overall collaborative approach to the management of the Park and the ""hands off", enabling role of CNPA. At present some websites (for example, those of some of our public sector partners) do not contain information that is appropriately structured for the National Park, although this situation is gradually improving. The creation of the Portal will create a degree of pressure for further appropriate changes to be made.

f) *Opportunities to maximise efficiencies* – the development of the Portal will readily highlight opportunities to maximise efficiencies, for example where a number of publicly funded sites are competing to provide the same or similar information. New opportunities will also become evident. Work is already is under way to plug one significant gap in relation to events. In the future all the information about events in the Park will be in one place, through working with www.hi-arts.com.

g) *Development of a dynamic network of websites associated with the Park* – in time we expect that a number of organisations will want to have their site linked to the Portal so that they can set their work in the context of the Park. Linkages from the Portal to

individual commercial sites will also be desirable but only where appropriate checks and balances are in place.

Issues still to be fully resolved:
a) How best to interact with private businesses

10.   There are, however, particular challenges associated with development of the web Portal. One of the trickiest issues has been how best to use the site to link with private sector partners in way that is equitable, supports initiatives to raise quality standards, demonstrates a joined-up approach by the public sector, works well with our current partners and, perhaps most important of all, provides the best possible online experience for visitors.

11.   The current working method has been to link through from the Portal to visitor- oriented, member-based organisations that are committed to promoting the area in the best possible light. This works well within the Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO area where an impressive new website has just been launched (see Annex A). The DMO site will provide much more detail about particular businesses within the area, the services they offer and visitor feedback. A similar approach will work well within the area covered by Glenlivet and the Cairngorms and the Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms DMO area (where work is currently under way).

12.   Never-the-less, a number of practical difficulties with this method have become apparent in discussions with the Steering Group, its constituent members and, more recently, with the Advisory Forums:
    a) Some other member-based organisations also would like visitors directed to their sites from the Portal, notably the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce (CCC).
    b) Some parts of the Park (e.g. the Angus Glens) are not effectively covered by DMOs that have plans in place to develop similar websites to those of Aviemore and the Cairngorms and Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms. This will make it difficult for the Portal to link through to businesses in an appropriate way.
    c) Concerns have been expressed from some tourism related businesses that an unfair advantage would be provided to members of the DMO(s). This is particularly acute where the businesses are already members of the CCC or have purchased marketing packages from VisitScotland.
    d) The two established DMOs still have relatively modest numbers of members and concerns have been expressed that a distorted impression might be given to visitors of, for example, the accommodation available in the Park if sole priority was given through the Portal to DMOs.

e) In addressing all of the above points the temptation may be to direct visitors to all of the sites mentioned. However, the plethora of sites involved is very likely to be confusing to visitors, especially if they are unfamiliar with the geography of the Park.

13.   Despite many hours of discussion amongst interested parties it has been concluded that finding a solution that addresses *all* of the above points together in a satisfactory way is almost impossible. The issues at stake have more to do with the underlying organisational structures (particularly the way in which the private businesses come together to work in relation to the National Park) than with website design or structure. Similar issues are addressed in the related paper on the agenda about DMOs.

b) *Dealing with visitor enquiries:*

14.   None of the organisations which are involved in the development of the Portal (with the exception of VisitScotland) are adequately resourced to deal with specific visitor enquires about accommodation, bookings, etc. At present the intention is to direct anyone wishing to make a general enquiry regarding accommodation to the central VS.com information resource in Livingston. A proforma is provided on the Portal to facilitate this process. While this is recognised to be imperfect it is the most effective option at present. In future there may be opportunities to address this with more local solutions if resources become available.

c) *Launch arrangements*

15.   At present the Portal is almost complete and ready to be launched. However, in view of the sensitivities about how best to work with private business interests (described above), we are minded to delay the launch for a period of about three months until the end of September. This will allow time for further discussions to take place amongst the business community about enhanced joint working at Park-wide level. Never-the-less, it will not be possible to delay the launch of the site indefinitely. As described above the web presence of the Park is very poor and only the Park Portal can provide an appropriate solution at the present time.

Future developments

16.   *Follow-up work:* Now that the site is close to completion there is still be work required on:

a) <u>Development of Content Ownership and Management Policy:</u> This will set out the arrangements for updating the content and the policies on linking though to other sites. An adaptive management approach and the use of simple service level agreements will be trialled in order to promote higher quality standards and clear policies about which commercial sites the Portal should link to.

b) <u>Marketing and promotion of the Portal:</u> This is essential work to make sure that the site remains high profile and is effective. The work is likely to include use of key performance indicators, search engine positioning strategy and use of web analytics.

17. *Development of next Phases*: Over time, the Portal will need to be developed in a phased way to meet the needs of an enhanced range of customers and to support a wider range of strategic goals in the National Park Plan. This could include promoting the Park as a place to live and work; Raising awareness about the Park's natural and cultural heritage significance; Facilitating access to detailed information about biological and other records; Improving communication and building closer relationships amongst local communities, businesses, voluntary organisations and other partners within the Park; Encouraging the active involvement of people in shaping the future of the Park.

18. *Use of Web 2.0*: Increasingly, websites are developing to become more interactive (rather than just providing information to users), based on content that is generated by users and can be an extremely useful tool to develop a community of people interested in a topic. All of this fits extremely well with the particular model of Park we have in the Cairngorms and the strategic objective to involve more people in the management of the Park. Two training events were recently provided on Web 2.0 for tourism businesses in the Park and there will undoubtedly be further opportunities to develop the Portal using Web 2.0 applications this way in due course.

19. *Ongoing management of the site:* At present CNPA has taken on day-to-day management of the Portal through the establishment phase and into its first year of operation. As the site develops to cover audiences beyond visitors CNPA may well be best placed to provide this management function. However, it may be possible to pass management responsibility for the site to another party at some point in the future and this should be reviewed with partners approximately 12 months after launching the site.

Consultation

20. A wide range of interested parties have been involved in the discussion about the site to date. The Steering Group already involves a range of interested parties as described above. During the developmental work

period progress reports have been provided to the two relevant Delivery Teams and the issue was extensively discussed at the recent meeting of the Enjoying and Understanding Advisory Forum. The Steering Group will continue to work together post-launch but as potential new audiences are developed, their focus will remain on the 'Visitor' experience of the Portal.

Policy Context

Delivering Sustainability
21.   The Portal will help direct users to the key information about the Park, building public support for looking after the area and encouraging public engagement and visitors. All of this will support objectives relating to the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the area.

Delivering A Park for All
22.   The Portal contains a specific Accessibility Statement confirming that all pages comply with WAI accessibility Level A or Priority 1 Guidelines and most Guidelines at Level AA or Priority 2. The site is designed for lots of different browsers and the text can be re-sized. Feedback on the accessibility of the site is invited from users.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency
23.   The Portal will help promote efficiency and effectiveness by structuring the information online about the Park much more effectively than has been the case in the past. It will help also partners work better together to provide appropriate online content about the Park.

Implications

Financial Implications
24.   Funding for the development of the site was approved by the Finance Committee in October 2007. Ongoing management of the site is provided directly by CNPA staff (in Economic and Social Development Group) for a period of 12 months after launch when the situation will then be subject to review. The management of the site will be considered along with at least three other websites under the direct management of CNPA. Funds are in place in the Operational Plan approved by the Board to cover basic site maintenance.

Presentational Implications
25.   The presentational implications of this project are generally very positive – the Portal will result in a web presence of the National Park that is considerably improved. However, there are some potentially negative aspects for some partners depending on what happens in relation to the private sector. This will be re-examined in due course in

the light of further information that will become available. The delay to launch may also present some presentational challenges but it is critical to provide space for private sector to resolve their own issues at this stage.

Implications for Stakeholders

26.   Most interested parties will benefit from the Portal project in terms of finding it easier to access information about the Park. The higher profile of the Brand image will also be broadly beneficial. All relevant stakeholders involved in the appropriate Delivery Team are supportive of the project.

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June 2008

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Annex 1
Press Release from Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation
1st July 2008

New tourism website where the customer has the last word.

1. A new website claiming to be the first of a new generation of regional tourism portals was launched today. www.visitaviemore.com promotes tourism in the Aviemore and the Cairngorms area within the Cairngorms National Park and incorporates the very latest in bringing tourism businesses closer to the consumer. The site uses new and evolving web2.0 features whilst also providing consumers with a no frills, no commission route direct to local businesses.

2. Alan Rankin the Chief executive of Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation (ACDMO) said today at the launch "This is the first of a new generation of 'sell and tell' area tourism portal websites. Businesses will be able to sell their product within a flexible web site but we also want to give visitors every opportunity to tell other visitors about their experiences in the area."

3. To support this ambition the site offers the possibility for every member accommodation business to have a direct feed from the Trip Adviser site where customer feedback is posted by the customer. Visitors are also asked to post their 'wow' comments on the ExtramileScotland website to help raise awareness of businesses that have provided extraordinary levels of service.Web2.0 features throughout the site with visitor videos, photos and blog links to various well known and popular sites all of which is aimed at keeping content fresh, up to date and of interest to different types of potential visitor.

4. Chief Executive of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Jane Hope said. "I very much welcome the launch of this new website which promises to deliver a very customer focused service for visitors and local businesses making it easier for everyone to find information and enjoy the Park."

5. The site offers visitors an ability to search for activities, accommodation attractions, things to do, where to eat and drink, shops and local events. More and more emphasis is being put on local activities, events and festivals as it is a common held view that people want to come to the area to do something and accommodation follows on from that. The importance of events is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the site lists over two hundred local events ranging from live music to steam train rallies that are happening across the Badenoch and Stathspey area in the peak visitor month of July.

6.   Rankin added, "The new site is all about driving enquiries direct to our member businesses. Our strategy is to get the potential customer to the business's website as that where the sale is made. It's our job to create interest in the area, present what the area has to offer and then get the consumer quickly and as easily as possible to the business they are interested in."

7.   The site will offer a quick direct search for accommodation and if for example a customer wants to know where the B&Bs are that have Wi-Fi, are dog friendly and have disabled access the site will find the properties from Grantown on Spey to Dalwhinnie that can provide such facilities and services in an instant from the list of ACDMO members.

8.   Sue Crossman director of the influential Scottish Tourism Innovation Group said. "The new Aviemore and the Cairngorms portal is a great example of how Web 2.0 technology can enhance a site, remain business focussed and is the best example of innovation within a tourism website for some time."

9.   Another feature of the site is when a visitor searches for activities in any specific area the search also displays nearby accommodation, places to eat and shop and local special offers. Cross- selling as it is known in the industry is one of the key planks of the national strategy to grow tourism by 50% so ACDMO are keen to provide this feature for both the consumer but also for local businesses to benefit from each other.

10.   Business listings on the site also clearly show the Visitscotland grading awards and Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) level achieved by a business in an effort to get key decision making information to the visitor. The new site has come together having carried out a great deal of research of successful destination sites around the world and gathered comment from tourism businesses as to what suits them, all backed up with a wealth of information on how the consumer is shopping for tourism and leisure.

Ends
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