

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 2

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Purpose

To inform the Board of our work to achieve the second strategic theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08, and to describe our plans for future activity.

Recommendations

- a) That the Board note the progress and plans for achieving the second theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08.

Executive Summary

The second theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08 reads:

“To promote sustainable resource, land and water management; and to protect and enhance our wildlife and landscapes”

Since the end of July 2005 the lead for delivery of Theme 2 has been shared between two groups derived from the re-organisation of the original Natural Resources Group. These are the Land Management Group led by Fiona Newcombe and the Natural Heritage Group led by David Bale. As of 19 June 2006, there has been a further restructuring with the creation of a new post occupied by Fiona Newcombe, the Head of Rural Development Strategy, and a new Natural Heritage and Land Management Group, headed by David Bale. The Head of Rural Development Strategy is the principal advisor to the Board and Chief Executive on strategies to influence the development of rural policies and mechanisms. The work of the Natural Heritage and Land Management Group is focused on:

- a) Advice on the natural heritage implications of Development Control and other CNPA activities;
- b) Finalisation of the natural heritage and land management aspects of the Park Plan and the priorities for action;
- c) Development of specific implementation projects to take forward the priorities for action;

- d) The delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, including specific projects such as the water vole conservation project and RaptorWatch;
 - e) Research and survey work to help to inform the development and application of action plans;
 - f) Land based business viability projects and initiatives
 - g) Advice on revisions of the Local Plan following the first phase of consultation.
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CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 2 – FOR INFORMATION

Background

1. This is the second report on the second theme of the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08:
"To promote sustainable resource, land and water management; and to protect and enhance our wildlife and landscapes"
2. The lead for delivery of this theme is now shared between the Head of Rural Development Strategy and the Natural Heritage and Land Management Group.

New structure

3. The need was identified to dedicate senior staff time to work with a wide range of partners to develop the Park's rural strategy around changes to national policy such as the Rural Development Programme. The new post, Head of Rural Development Strategy, is the principal advisor to the Board and Chief Executive on strategies to influence the development of rural policies and mechanisms. Although the work of the post in delivering theme 2 is reported here, it should be noted that the new post is also working with staff across the organisation on the delivery of themes 1, 3 and 4.
4. As a consequence of the creation of the above new post, there is a new Natural Heritage and Land Management Group. This group now includes the Head of Group, Senior Land Management Officer, Ecology Advisor, Landscape Advisor, the LBAP Officers, the water vole project officer and two new posts recruited on secondment for two years each. One is the Senior Integrated Land Management Officer (SILMO) who will be taking forward a number of land management initiatives, mainly in the lower ground, including marketing of produce. This post will work closely with the Head of Rural Development Strategy to implement practical delivery of agreed objectives. The post holder, Fiona Chalmers will be starting work in September. The other is the SILMO for deer and uplands. The post holder Colin McClean will start on 7 August and will be taking forward practical implementation of the deer priorities arising from the Park Plan.

Rural Development

5. A paper was brought to Board in June 2006 setting out our response to the Rural Development Programme (RDP) consultation. It set out three key objectives for the CNP:
 - i) That the priorities for the programme in the Cairngorms be agreed by a range of stakeholders;
 - ii) To establish and oversee an effective advisory mechanism that delivers high quality applications under the programme; and
 - iii) To monitor and review the outcomes of the programme. We also proposed a regional mechanism for achieving this – the Cairngorms Regional Committee.

6. At the time of writing, there have been no decisions from the Scottish Executive on the implementation of the RDP. We have been continuing to work closely with a range of partners to develop thinking of these three objectives and have had positive feedback about the Cairngorms Regional Committee. However, this proposal may not be implemented immediately, and to mitigate this, we are also working closely with partners to enable us to achieve the three objectives through alternative regional mechanisms.

Water Framework Directive

7. SEPA have now set up the Area Advisory Groups. Their objective is to contribute to the Water Framework Directive's River Basin Management planning process, which aims to: prevent deterioration and enhance the status of aquatic ecosystems; promote sustainable water use; reduce pollution; and contribute to the mitigations of flood and droughts.
8. The Cairngorms National Park is split into three Area Advisory Groups (AAGs): Northeast Scotland; Tay, and Argyll. The Northeast Scotland AAG covers most of the CNP. We are currently full members of the Northeast Scotland, and corresponding members of the Tay and Argyll Area Advisory Groups. Our objectives for membership are to integrate the River Basin Management Planning process with the National Park and Local Plans, and with other national policies such as the Rural Development Regulation. The Spey Catchment Management Plan and the emerging Dee Catchment Management Plan will provide a more detailed approach to the management of those river systems within and beyond the Park.

Rothiemurchus Public Benefit Study

9. Rothiemurchus Estate is a special place for wildlife, landscape, culture, visitors and the local economy and community in Strathspey. This importance was shown by the signing of a Concordat by public sector bodies and the Estate in 2001. There are changes happening in public sector funding, such as the new Rural Development Programme. To help prepare for these changes, the Rothiemurchus Concordat Steering Group agreed to review the public benefits that the public sector has 'bought' or 'received' from Rothiemurchus Estate over the last 5 years. A draft report is currently being considered by the Concordat steering group.

RaptorWatch Project

10. In the Theme 2 report in December 2005 it was stated that a fuller account would be given for this project. The opportunity of this current report is chosen to present this account which is based on the approved Expenditure Justification. North East Scotland RaptorWatch is a partnership project that aims to address the problem of declining populations of rare or endangered species of birds of prey that breed in the uplands of North East Scotland. The partners in the project are Scottish Natural Heritage, Grampian Police, RSPB Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Regular surveys and long-term monitoring over the years has revealed

significant declines in the populations and breeding success of Peregrine Falcons, Golden Eagles and Hen Harriers, particularly those on heather moorland managed for Red Grouse. The decline in populations may be the result of a combination of causes including poor weather conditions and habitat deterioration, but there is clear and persistent evidence, through recorded incidences of shooting, poisoning and trapping, that illegal persecution is a major cause of these declines in North East Scotland. It was against this background that the North East Scotland RaptorWatch was set up.

11. The partnership is employing a project officer to lead the project on the ground, including engagement with land owners/managers and co-ordination and implementation of a monitoring programme for the three target species. To date 10 estates have signed up to participate in the scheme this season, and a number of others are in discussions with the possibility of joining for next year's breeding season.
12. The Aims of the project are:
 - a) To achieve a measurable increase, over the initial three year timescale of the project, in the numbers, site occupancy and breeding success of Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles, and Peregrines within North East Scotland through positive habitat management and measures to prevent and reduce the incidence of direct and indirect persecution of these species.
 - b) To achieve through the active cooperation of all land managers and partners, a measurable reduction in all wildlife crime associated with birds of prey within the Project area by the end of the initial Project period.
 - c) To establish an annual forum where all partners and interested parties, can discuss issues related to moorland management, upland raptors, wildlife crime, gamebird releases, and the sustainable economic benefits of a well – managed natural environment and sound conservation practices.
 - d) To establish and maintain a positive working relationship between the owners of sporting estates, employed gamekeepers, statutory agencies, raptor biologists and enthusiasts, Grampian Police and nature conservation bodies that is based on the promotion of sound and sustainable upland moorland management to the benefit of all parties, and on the basis of full compliance with the legal status of the natural environment and all component species of fauna and flora.
 - e) To develop existing monitoring for moorland raptors to yield accurate and reliable information on range occupancy, breeding performance and where possible causes of failure.
13. The focus of this project contributes towards the draft Park Plan priorities for Action currently out for consultation, namely "Conserving and Enhancing the Park's Biodiversity and Landscapes". In particular they are a means of implementing one of the themes in the outline action programme, "Protecting Biodiversity" and the establishment of partnerships against wildlife crime targeted at raptor persecution/conservation.

14. RaptorWatch is the first specific project to emerge from a broader Grampian Wildlife Crime partnership which is under process of establishment. The latter will deal with a range of problems including fresh water pearl mussel fishing, badger crime, game poaching etc, and seek to combine these measures with a series of positive land management incentives. The initial phase of the RaptorWatch project is confined to the former Grampian Region in recognition of the geographic coverage of the other 3 partners: Grampian Police, Grampian Area SNH and NE Scotland Region RSPB. It also extends to uplands outwith the Park boundary, but a high proportion of activity will be devoted to the Park in recognition of the high proportion of suitable moorland within it. Lessons learnt from this pilot project will inform decisions on how to extend its purposes to cover the rest of the Park. This will, however, require a new or extended partnership to include Highland Police, East Highland SNH and Highland Region RSPB. Other partners may become involved in due course.

Water Vole Project

15. A water vole officer has been in post since April to carry out urgent water vole conservation work in the Park. Water voles are threatened across the UK with catastrophic declines and the real threat of extinction. The remaining populations in the Park contribute to the special qualities and are also a national responsibility. The officer's work includes surveys of the remnant colonies, evaluation of their viability and collaboration with keepers and other land managers to deploy mink control apparatus and positive habitat management. The officer has been well received by Estates that have been contacted to date and more are being contacted. The project is looking to expand to include two additional project officers and support equipment. This is dependant on winning funding from the Tubney Trust, a Charitable organisation that supports conservation efforts. The project is a partnership between SNH, Aberdeen University and CNPA, with CNPA providing office and line management support, and use of pool cars or T&S for use of the officer's own vehicle. The University is also seeking money from the Natural Environment Research Council to develop a research programme into the success of the methods used in safeguarding and expanding the vole population.

Landscape

16. The Landscape Adviser, Matthew Hawkins, started work on 22 May. He is providing effective landscape advice to Development Control colleagues and other parts of the CNPA as necessary. He is developing two projects that will help to inform the development of a landscape strategy in order to assist in the progression of landscape aspects of the Park Plan. Both are in partnership with SNH. One is to extend what is part of a nation wide project to assess the special landscape and scenic qualities of all the National Scenic Areas in Scotland. Our involvement will enable the same methodology to be applied to an assessment of landscape and scenic qualities across the National Park, rather than just within its two NSAs. This will also build upon the existing Landscape Character Assessments to help gain a better understanding of the value and quality of the landscapes across the Park. The second is a project to assess potential changes to landscapes that may occur as the

result of various types of development, or changes in land management, and how people perceive them.

17. The Board will recall the meeting on 5 May at which it approved the CNPA response to the Scottish Executive's consultation on the future of National Scenic Areas. The response sought the following:
 - a) to have National Parks as a whole recognised as a contribution to the identification and protection of Scotland's finest landscapes;
 - b) In line with the above, to rescind National Scenic Areas within the National Park in order to avoid confusion and remove anomalies;
 - c) To extend the planning protection measures that currently only apply to NSAs, and especially the removal of certain permitted development rights, so that they cover the whole Park.
18. Since submitting that response, officers have been in further discussions with the Executive, in combination with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and SNH. As a result we have written a supplementary letter that recognises that it would not be possible to achieve all our objectives within the context of the revisions to the Planning Bill. Instead we suggest that the changes could be brought about through pending reviews of a combination of complementary legislation, with adequate enabling powers and safeguards written into each, and appropriate cross references. We have yet to learn how this suggestion has been received.

Deer

19. The Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group has been established comprising representatives from communities, land managers, statutory bodies and NGOs. The group has to date held two meetings principally to agree its remit and to discuss the deer issues in the Park Plan. The group will be very important in advising on the development of meaningful and deliverable actions to achieve the range of Park Plan objectives for deer. The agenda of the group will, however, be set by the group as a whole and not just CNPA. CNPA provides the secretariat and organisation of the meetings. This group will be supported by the Integrated Land Management Officer for deer and uplands.
20. The deer and upland officer will also be looking at options how best to deliver the Plan priorities for the management of moorlands, drawing upon experience gained from the Moorland Project amongst others.

Integrated Land Management Advisory Forum

21. The ILMAF met in March, May and early August 2006, covering themes as diverse as agricultural waste, moorland management, the Forestry Framework, land based business training project, the Scottish Rural Development Plan, Access management and the most significantly the National Park Plan. The Forum continues to provide an invaluable opportunity for sharing the thoughts and ideas of a wide range of highly experienced people with a land management interest within the National Park.

Farm Business Viability

22. We are currently assessing three potential approaches to helping to increase the business viability of farms in the Park. The purpose is to help to maintain an active farming sector in the Park and actively seek to maximise the public benefits that are and can be derived from long established farming practices. Expenditure Justifications will be presented to the Finance Committee shortly for the scheme or schemes judged to offer the best value for money. The project will ensure that there is inclusion of farmers and crofters from across the Park.

In-bye farmland Survey

23. A contract has been let to undertake a survey of the in-bye farmland in Strathspey. About 9,500ha of rough grazing and permanent pasture will be surveyed to identify the range and quality of semi-natural grassland, heathland and fen in the Strath. The area has long been considered to be of high value for farmland habitats as confirmed by the earlier designation as an Environmentally Sensitive Area. Despite this, there has been no systematic survey to find out what interests are present. The results of the project will help CNPA to identify preferred locations for priorities for Rural Development Programme schemes. The results will also be used to help to understand the degree of connection between valuable habitats and the opportunities to increase the value of these networks for a range of wildlife as well as landscape benefits. In future years a similar survey is planned for the Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus parts of the Park.

Agri-waste

24. CNPA continue to assist farmers with the proper disposal of used sheep dip in the Badenoch and Strathspey area. Plans are being drawn up to provide further assistance to farmers throughout the National Park with the recycling of waste plastics. We will be contributing towards the costs of transporting waste plastic from silage bales etc to the nearest recycling points. This is an interim initiative until it is clear how Government intends to tackle an issue which is national in its scope.

Forestry

25. Following the board paper on forestry on 2nd June, a summary of the updated Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework has been produced. The summary, full document and the original 1999 Framework will be available on a specific dedicated webpage on the CNPA website very soon.
26. We have met with Aberdeenshire Council representatives to discuss the recent board recommendations and are due to meet with the Forestry Commission, other local authorities and SNH in the near future. This is to ensure the CNPA role in forestry matters is clearly understood by all, adds value and does not duplicate the role of others.

Communication & Consultation Grant Scheme for Land Managers

27. The Communications Grant Scheme is up and running. The grant scheme is intended to encourage improved communication between land managers and the public and local communities. So far, we have used the scheme to support a very successful open day at Glenlivet Estate and the production of an attractive and informative booklet on Balmoral Estate which repeatedly asks for the reader to feedback their views on the management of the Estate. Also nearing completion is an application by Upland Contracts to run a series of workshops across the park encouraging community involvement and increasing understanding of the complexities of path planning. We are in contact with seven other estates / land based businesses in the Park, currently considering ways of using the scheme.

Park Plan

28. The Park Plan continues to be a major area of work. We shall be working with the Park Plan Officers to revise the Plan following the period of consultation, and to draw up finalised priorities for action for natural heritage, deer and land management in consultation with partners for action. The Park Plan and Priorities will be the main steer for our work into the future.

Draft Local Plan

29. Following the completion of the first round of consultation, we shall be assisting the Local Plan Officers in the revision of policies and settlement statements as they relate to natural heritage and land management. This work will seek to conserve and enhance the special natural heritage qualities of the Park.

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