

**Priorities for the Year Ahead – Synopsis of Presentation by Daniel Alexander,
Head of Communications**

Key early priorities are understanding our target audiences, message development, raising profile in the media, and improving co-ordination and accessibility of our communication with our key audiences.

Key questions are: who are our target audiences? and what are we trying to communicate?

Audiences

I see three key target audiences:

1. People living within the Park – who we need to keep informed about what we are doing, and engage in a continuous dialogue, or conversation. I would like to explore ways of better understanding what this group think of us in an objective way, perhaps through opinion polling. By their nature, responses to consultations are self-selecting and not necessarily representative. I would like to work particularly closely with the directly elected board members on this.
2. Key stakeholders in the Park, most importantly the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament, to whom we have to demonstrate our continued relevance to their broader agenda. This also includes partner organisations here - local authorities, agencies etc, who we need to continue to actively build positive relations with.
3. The people of Scotland – we are a *National* Park, after all – and more broadly potential visitors to the Park from the rest of the UK and indeed the world.

Messages

I think a lot of my early work is going to focus on the content of what we are trying to communicate. A lot of this material is already out there, in Andrew's speeches for example or in publications and documents, but I would like to work with you to bring together a clear statement of our core messages both about the Park Authority and the Park Area (and we must remember that these are distinct, if very similar) more broadly. This difference is important - the Authority is not the "the Park".

By its nature, this will be an ongoing process, revised and extended as the board considers strategies and policies in new areas. But it is important that we all 'sing from the same song sheet' when necessary. I would see this as linked in with the development of the Park brand, upon which I have been working with the Marketing Sub-Group.

Media profile of work of NPA and our partners

My second early priority is to raise the profile of the work that we are already doing. Clearly, the goodwill that we have from local people and other stakeholders is a finite resource, and we need to work hard not only actually to deliver, but also to demonstrate publicly that we are delivering. We should also be positively promoting the strong partnership that we work with to get things done.

Appendix 1
To Minutes of Board Meeting of 12/03/04

I have already started working with my colleagues to build up a picture of the key staging posts in the various projects and programmes that we are involved in and can publicise. This is not a matter of spin – just of making sure that we tell people what we are up to. And of course we will make sure that Board members know in advance of stories that we are putting out.

I have also started work to build media contacts, starting with the two most important papers to us, the Strathy and the Piper. But I also think that many of the things that we do are of interest to the Scottish, UK, and even international media.

In addition, I am delighted that many members of the board have good contacts with the media and that these can be put to good use in our external communications.

However, I also know that many of you wear many hats, and it is important that the media know which hat you are wearing when you speak to them. Especially on controversial issues, this can sometimes cause confusion about what the National Park is or isn't saying.

In general, I would be grateful if you would not speak on behalf of the authority without letting me know – ideally in advance. This is not about control – just a desire to make sure that what we are saying or seen to be saying is co-ordinated. And of course by the same token I hope I can work closely with board members as we go about raising our profile.

Finally, a number of board members have said to me that they would find it useful if we could organise some media training to help you with your dealings with the media and interviews. I will be putting together a media training programme, and I would be grateful if you could let me know if you would be interested in taking this up.

In addition to co-ordinating our communications within the organisation, I am also working to build links with communications staff with the other organisations that have a stake in the Park. Given our role as an enabling organisation, I intend to pull together a network of press officers to share information. We will also be appointing a Press Officer in the Communications Group.

Communicating accessibly

I will also be taking responsibility for our newsletter, Park Life, and working with colleagues to help to co-ordinate the flow of information that we are providing directly to our key audiences. We need the various things that we are doing to reinforce, not cut across, each other. The website is particularly important in all of this as it is the first way that many people will have direct experience of the CNPA.

I have also been asked to produce a paper for the board, in June, on improving the comprehensibility of the information that we provide. We have an extremely good record on transparency and openness – second to none – in that papers are available to the public as are board and planning meetings.

Appendix 1
To Minutes of Board Meeting of 12/03/04

But we also need to think about how we can add to that a reputation for providing information that is easy for people to digest and comprehend. For example, the Corporate Plan is an excellent document but we cannot and should not expect most people to read through the entire document. In future, for example, we might want to produce a summary version.

In conclusion, I hope that through the work I have described in these areas – understanding our audiences, pulling together our messages, raising the media profile, improving the accessibility of our information – I and the communications group can make a contribution to our objective of ‘developing an enabling organisation that is trusted and respected.’ I look forward to working with you all to do that, and would be interested to hear your comments and views now.

Daniel Alexander
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