

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

Prepared by: GRANT MOIR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose:

1. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation:

2. **Cairngorms Nature:** The Cairngorms Nature BIG 10 Days at Home, a virtual version of the BIG weekend normally held each year in May, was a huge success with over 80 on-line events. Rangers, land managers, NGOs and communities all contributed material to bring the outstanding nature of the Cairngorms into people's living rooms during lockdown.

CNPA and partners were successful with a number of applications to round two of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund. Work focused on delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan includes river restoration and riparian planting, aspen planting and protection, habitat management for farmland waders and targeted action for Cairngorms Nature priority species including fresh water pearl mussel and pine hoverfly.

Through National Park Partnerships, CLIF, the energy bar company, has pledged £10,000 to fund a conservation project in the Cairngorms National Park. The project will focus on the endangered narrow headed ant and will take place later in the year on the National Trust for Scotland's Mar Lodge Estate in Deeside. CNPA is one of five projects being supported this year – the other projects are in the Brecon Beacons, Dartmoor, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and North Yorkshire Moors National Parks.

3. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** The development phase of the project formally ended in March 2020, although CNPA and partners continue to support some of the project's work as part of ongoing conservation operations, and the application for Delivery Phase has been submitted. The National Lottery Heritage Fund UK committee meet to discuss and determine the application on 10th June. If successful, the Delivery Phase of the project (2020 – 2023) will implement the plans developed during the Development Phase. Plans include all five areas of work (habitat creation, improved monitoring, investigating genetic health, raising awareness and understanding and community participation).

4. **Woodland expansion targets:** We continue to be in discussion with a wide variety of landowners across the Park, encouraging them to develop woodland creation plans and advising others on maximizing the benefits of schemes that are in development. Our temporary intern Cameron Cosgrove carried out an excellent desk-based GIS study for us identifying hitherto unmapped areas of woodland and isolated trees. This will help us to protect and hopefully expand vulnerable native woodland remnants. The impact of Covid 19 lockdown on deer management and consequently woodland regeneration is a major concern we have highlighted with colleagues in Scottish Government.
5. **Peatland Restoration:** Lockdown has prevented fieldwork and delayed getting contractors on site, but the peatland officers have been ensuring work will be ready to go as soon as possible when conditions allow. Staff have also been developing plans for CNPA being directly funded by Peatland Action as an alternative to managing projects through administration by SNH. We are very grateful for the work carried out by Peter Green, our intern who has been mapping priority areas for peatland restoration across the Park.
6. **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership:** The National Lottery Heritage Fund have agreed to a three month extension to the TGLP which means we have until end of December to complete all the projects and finalise arrangements for the legacy management of the programme. There is still much to do and the staff team, partners and volunteers are still extremely busy. We are continuing to progress as much as possible during lockdown which has delayed a number of projects. The most significant areas of work remaining to be completed are: comprehensive interpretation across the area, digital archiving, woodland-creation demonstration, dark skies lighting improvements and a wide range community led natural heritage projects. We were sorry to see Jackie Taylor leave for another job and we wish her and Amy Woolvin (now on maternity leave) all the best.

Visitor Experience:

7. **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum:** CLOAF are being informed of temporary changes to the access legislation and consulted on the ease of Lockdown work.
8. **Long Distance Routes:**
 - a) **Speyside Way:** Extension from Aviemore to Newtonmore now 'open' with further work on signage to be completed autumn 2020. Work on installing new or upgrading old, branded map boards at key 'drop off' points along the whole route within CNP is also underway. Additional funds secured from SNH to upgrade sections of the existing route within the National Park will be used in autumn and winter 2020. Newtonmore Business Association has secured funds and planning consent for installation of a seat sculpture for the start/end point of the new route with possible opening autumn 2020.
 - b) **Deeside Way Extension:** Planning consent in place for the section from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge with funding included as a potential project in CNP Recovery Plan. Sustrans Scotland leading on a project to improve the existing NCN195/Deeside Way from Aberdeen to Ballater.

9. **Mountains and People Project:** This five year Lottery funded project was due to complete in June 2020 but due to Covid-19 has been extended. Agreement with OATS on path maintenance and volunteering are part of a partnership agreement approved by CNPA Finance and Delivery Board Group in March 2020.
10. **Seasonal Rangers:** CNPA is currently recruiting seven seasonal rangers to support communities, land managers and existing ranger services in providing safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors post Covid-19. These temporary staff will work at the key countryside visitor destinations in Deeside and Badenoch & Strathspey from June until end of October.
11. **Volunteering & Health Walks:** Both volunteer rangers and health walks are on 'lockdown' with CNPA staff regularly communicating with all involved so that interest is maintained and people are ready to 'restart' when safe.
12. **Education and Inclusion:** This work is currently on 'hold' with no John Muir Awards or Junior Ranger programs being delivered. It is worth noting that there is a growing national interest in the positive role that locally delivered outdoor education has to play in safely engaging with young people post Covid-19.
13. **Information and Interpretation:** Designs for the interpretation and information to be installed in CNPA office in Ballater are reaching final stage. As an unstaffed center this has potential to be opened in summer of 2020.

Rural Development:

14. **Local Development Plan 2020:** Examination of Plan is under way. The Reporters had hoped to complete work by May 2020 but travel restrictions have delayed the expected timetable to June. CNPA has responded to a few queries and information requests during the examination.
15. **Planning Casework:** There was live broadcast of Planning Committee for the first time in May. Planning casework has continued during Covid-19 with applications at House of Bruar (gallery extension), Cairngorm Mountain funicular, and Kingussie (conversion of police station for short term holiday lets) approved and a forestry related track prior notification at Glen Clova also approved.
16. **Community-led Housing Delivery:** Many projects have slowed during Covid-19 restrictions. Braemar community housing project development continuing but currently delayed over obtaining secure access to the land. Tomintoul project study into low carbon systems is nearly complete. Currently inviting design and build tenders.
17. **Economic Action Plan:** Economic Steering Group met in April and will meet in June. Focus of partners has been on reaction to Covid-19 and refocusing to support economic recovery during and post Covid-19, inputting to Green Recovery Plan.
18. **Smart Villages:** Project to develop Smart Villages to promote collaboration using digital technology is underway in Badenoch, Grantown and Ballater / Braemar. The project is delivered by the charity Growbiz.
19. **Cairngorm Mountain:** Planning application for strengthening works approved. Applications for recreational facilities and car-park charging are in the pipeline.

Consultants for HIE are preparing the Masterplan which will be subject to further public consultation and discussion with CNPA.

21. **Tourism Action Plan:** Cairngorms Tourism Emergency Response Group has been meeting weekly. The current Plan is at the mid-point of its five year period coinciding with the results of the 2019/20 visitor survey. A brief review of the plan will be undertaken including the survey results. This information, and the results of several national and regional surveys looking at the impact of Covid-19 on visitors, will shape a revised plan that will outline our visitor & tourism work for the next two years.
22. **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund:** SNH has completed work on the Muir of Dinnet NNR car park, improving and upgrading the site and making it accessible to campervans and installing waste disposal facilities. The new roadside tarmac path in Glenmore linking the Old Logging Way from the Beach Car Park to Hayfield Bridge has been delayed by Covid-19. Construction is scheduled for autumn 2020.
23. **A9 Dualling project:** Transport Scotland have now committed to design and fund installation of new off-road route for non-motorized users from Aviemore to Carrbridge in association with A9 dualling work. CNPA are meeting with Transport Scotland and Atkins Mouchel in June to discuss the next steps.
24. **Badenoch Great Place Project:** New Project Officer (Caroline Sterritt) started in post Apr 20. Project being progressed where possible through the Covid-19 crisis. An extension until end Oct 21 was secured from NLHF enabling much of activity Programme to be delayed until and rescheduled.

Stakeholder Engagement:

25. Significant stakeholder engagement has taken place across the organisation in the face of Covid-19 at a national and local level. This has included the involvement at a national level with the Environment and Economy Leaders Group, Scottish Tourism Emergency response Group, the ENFOR Access Group & the Rural Economy Group.
26. There has also been significant local engagement across the Green Recovery Plan and the Visitor Management Planning with organisations, partners and communities across the Park.

Communications:

27. **Cairngorms Nature Campaign:** The first 'virtual' Cairngorms Nature Festival took place from 15 – 24 May as the [10 BIG Days of Cairngorms Nature at Home](#). Each day had a theme with online activities, blogs, films music and art including family-friendly activities designed for those who may be quite new to nature, through to specialist and exclusive items with experts to discover the landscapes and wildlife in the Cairngorms National Park. Working with more than 20 partners the programme offered over 80 'events' to choose from and resulted in 4,226 'visitors' taking part. The social media reach was 462,141 across all platforms and we had great support online with the #BIG10Days. Full statistics are being finalized but can be seen here: <https://infogram.com/lp6lr0yqvq0dwqc5k5m15prlqa3053kzxy?live>

28. **Make It Yours Campaign:** Due to the COVID lockdown the Visitor Survey stopped at the beginning of March. A final report of the findings are being prepared and will be posted on the CNPA website. We are also working on developing an online version of the MIY visitor facing staff training session and supporting the Growbiz Smart Village project by sharing the MIY support materials on the Smart Village web hubs.
29. **Active Cairngorms:** The current focus on this work is now agreeing, and delivering, with a range of national and regional partners positive, concise and consistent messages that promote safe responsible access to the National Park as we come out of Covid-19 lockdown. During April a campaign focused on safe and responsible access to the outdoors including keeping dogs on leads during lambing and bird nesting season, no fires during high fire risk periods and Scottish Government messages to Stay Safe, Stay at Home and to exercise once a day, close to home and only with members or your own household.
30. **Corporate Communications:** Work is underway to continue to support Scottish Government messages during the COVID pandemic and to prepare for the gradual easing of lockdown with a coordinated communications campaign focusing on *Being Safe Outside* and *Be Kind* to each other and nature.

Organisational Development:

31. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP):** We are consulting with staff around plans for the ease of Lockdown. CNPA phases for easing the lockdown are aligned with the SG roadmap, and until we move to SG phase 3, staff access to the office is strictly restricted to business critical purposes, and is managed by the BCP team. Staff have had the opportunity to attend drop-in sessions to inform thinking in this regard, and planning for when in-door office workplaces can open. Currently, we are mapping out maximum staff numbers and desk spaces according to official social distancing and PPE guidance.
32. **Office Extension Project:** We are still developing plans to upgrade the meeting and social space in the old building, and improve cycle storage, but these are on hold pending full return of staff to the office.
33. **Staffing update:** Since March, staffing updates are as follows:
 - a) Cameron Cosgrove, Woodland Intern, and Peter Green, Peatland Intern both left, their fixed term internship contracts having come to an end.
 - b) Bruce McConachie resigned from his post as Land Management Adviser.
 - c) Jackie Taylor resigned from her post as TGLP Project Manager.
 - d) Daniel Farmer has been appointed to the fixed term Graduate Planner post, and joins the Authority in June.
34. **Youth Employment:**
 - a) **Internships:** We have extended Bruce MacDonald's contract as the Gaelic Intern to early 2021.
 - b) **Apprenticeships:** Our IT Apprentice, Reece Musgrave is leaving in August to study IT at university. It is our intention to recruit another IT intern on a 2-year fixed term contract, to replace Reece.

35. **Shared Services:** Continued work to provide HR support the Scottish Land Commission has included the development of new policies, the development, staff consultation and submission of the 20/21 pay remit, which has recently been approved and implemented.

Grant Moir
June 2020

Board Convener Report – For Information

The past few months have inevitably been dominated by COVID-19 and the National Park response to this. This past few months has shown the strengths of our Board and staff team and I would like to express my thanks to all our staff for their hard work to ensure business continued as close to normal as is possible.

Our Business Continuity Planning has been comprehensive, and has worked well. Fortunately we have not been as badly affected absence wise as we feared and no aspects of leadership continuity have required to be enacted.

In addition to their normal workload, staff have taken on additional COVID-19 related workload, in particular the development of our Green Recovery Plan and Visitor Management Plans supported by seasonal rangers. These are huge pieces of work and they have turned them around in record time. This sort of agility is going to be very important in the post COVID world and the CNPA is well placed to respond.

We have had a positive response from stakeholders to our Green Recovery Plan and the recent situation has shown how strong many of our partnerships are and has given us all a reason to strengthen them further, because unless we work together we will not be able to recover. I have had positive discussions with the Chairs of HIE, Visit Scotland and Scottish Enterprise all of whom will be key partners in recovery, along with our five local authorities, the CBP and our business and tourism associations.

It is also worth reflecting on some non-COVID achievements. The CNPA held a Cairngorms Climate Conference – Net Zero with Nature in Aviemore, attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, CEO of the UK Committee on Climate Change, and many other key players nationally which reflects the level of respect the Cairngorm National Park is held in. However, for me the most important message from the day, came from our community representatives, businesses and land managers who were united in their determination to play their part in the wider effort.

For a small public body the CNPA has shown it can have a big impact and the current crisis has shown our resilience too.

Xander McDade
Board Convener

External Engagements (28th November 2019 – 04th June 2020)

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue
3/2	Capercaillie Connect Meeting with G. Moir, W. McKenna & J. Kirk	Carrbridge
21/2	Meeting with Andrew Bowie MP	Ballater
26/2	Meeting with Keith Connal and Bridget Campbell, Scottish Government	Perth
9/3	Cairngorms Climate Conference	Aviemore

17/3	COVID-19 Conference Call for Environment Public Bodies with Scottish Government	By phone
6/4	Economic Recovery Plan Meeting	By VC
19/5	Conference call with Alistair Dodds, Chair HIE	By phone
19/5	Conference call with Lord Thurso, Chair Visit Scotland	By VC
28/5	Conference call with Lord Smith, Chair Scottish Enterprise	By phone

Board Updates

Judith Webb

Chaired remote CUAG meeting – including discussion on issues for the Recovery Plan and those areas of key concern to CUAG members, these have been fed back and used in drafting of the plan.

Attended Cairngorms Nature Steering Group – focused on the Recovery Plan. A very positive meeting with good questions and discussion around the plan.