

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR INFORMATION

**Title:** Corporate Plan Report: Theme 1

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#### **Purpose**

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

#### **Recommendations**

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

#### **Executive Summary**

The first theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08 is:

“To enable current and future generations to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the Park in a way that fosters those qualities and supports the activities of others.”

This report has been structured around key policy areas and a brief progress report and consideration of future plans is given under the following headings:

- a) Sustainable tourism
- b) Outdoor access
- c) Ranger services
- d) Visitor information and interpretation
- e) Entry point markers
- f) John Muir Award

## CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 1

### Background

1. This paper is the one of a rolling series of reports on the five strategic themes within the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. This paper concerns the first theme in the Plan:

“To enable current and future generations to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the Park in a way that fosters those qualities and supports the activities of others”
2. The term “special qualities” comes from the third aim of the National Park but the concept of conserving and enhancing these qualities lies at the heart of why the area has been designated as a National Park and will be central to the Park Plan. A Working Paper on the special qualities has been prepared based on a number of pieces of other work (including Sam Ham's stakeholder workshops on interpretive themes, the development of the brand wheel and the consultation on the Local Plan). This work will be the subject of further consultation as part of the Park Plan.
3. Delivery of the first Corporate Plan theme is primarily the responsibility of the Visitor Services and Recreation Group and the Economic and Social Development Group, although other staff also make important contributions. This report has been structured around key policy areas and a brief progress report and consideration of future plans is given under each heading.

### Sustainable Tourism

4. Most of the strategic work in this area has been centred on the development of the strategy that formed the application for the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The Park was visited by an assessor from Europarc for a two day period in May and interviews were conducted with staff and a number of stakeholders. News on the outcome of the application is expected very soon. Meanwhile the ViSIT Forum (Visitor Information, Services and Tourism) continue to advise on implementation of the Strategy. The strategy will also be an important contribution to the Park Plan.
5. The first suite of Cairngorms Connections courses has now been delivered in partnership with Tourist Board Training and University of the Highlands and Islands (Moray College). The courses provide foundation level understanding of the tourism product with in the Park and have generally been well received. There are plans to run a further series of courses in October and to investigate the possibility of an online version in conjunction with the Scottish Tourist Guide Association (for Blue Badge Guides).
6. There was significant tourism sector input to the Park Brand through the ViSIT Forum. The Brand is now being rolled out on signage and other products and is being used to promote participation in quality assurance and green tourism schemes. The brand has also featured prominently on the growing family of visitor-oriented

publications including the Visitor Guide, the Cairngorms Explorer public transport timetable and the Countryside Events Leaflet. Its use has also recently been approved on the new commercial Park wide publication “Park i”.

## Outdoor Access

7. The Park Authority took on its new duties and powers as the access authority in early February 2005. The Authority has four specific duties and has made significant delivery progress as described below (the core duties are printed in italics).
8. The *Local Outdoor Access Forum* (LOAF) met for first time in late March 2005 and comprises 21 members made up of land managers, recreational users, communities and public agencies. The role of the Forum is to advise on the matters relating to Outdoor Access. There was keen interest in the Forum with over 70 applications for the available places. The Forum is due to elect their chair at the next meeting in early September when they will also receive an update on a number of site specific unresolved access issues.
9. Over the next few months the LOAF members will have an important contribution to make to the development of the Outdoor Access Strategy. This will form the basis of the *Core Paths Plan* and will feed into the Park Plan. The audit stage is now nearing completion and a small steering group has been formed to oversee the process, comprising members from the Board, LOAF, one local authority and the Paths for All Partnership. A Board seminar is being planned during the autumn. Meanwhile work is under way on a pilot project on Core Paths Planning in Newtonmore and further pilot project is being investigated in Strathdon.
10. A considerable amount of work has gone into *publicising the new Scottish Outdoor Access Code* and promoting awareness and understanding of it. A joint programme of activity has been prepared with SNH and advice taken from both the relevant advisory Forums. Activity has included giving presentations to special interest groups, placing adverts in relevant publications, producing displays for use at events and shows and (very recently) posting a copy of the Code to all accommodation providers in the Park. Further work is required to ensure that local retail outlets and other places that visitors frequent have visible material relating to the Code. Plans are well advanced to provide further training events with the Land Based Business Training Scheme. In the years ahead we will wish to target more specific audiences and refine the messages we wish to communicate.
11. The Park Authority has a duty to *uphold access rights* and staff are currently dealing with a number of complaints or queries about access rights and responsible behaviour from members of the public and land managers. The Board approved procedures for dealing with such queries in June and staff are working to publicise these new procedures in an appropriate, generally low key, way.
12. A number of specific projects relating to improving the infrastructure for outdoor access have moved forward in recent months, as summarised in the table below:

	<b>Progress report</b>	<b>Future plans</b>
Speyside Way	Work is in hand to allow CNPA to sign the agreement for the existing route. CNPA has funded new visitor centre at Aberlour.	Due to come to September Board. Centre to be formally opened in September.
Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore	The consultation is complete and route options have been assessed	Report due at September Board
Upland path repair at Bachnagairn, Balmoral Estate	CNPA has offered funds	Work to commence as soon as possible
Installation of Monega bridge, near Glenshee	CNPA has offered funds and the work is under way	-
Ballater Golf Course all abilities path	CNPA has offered funds	Work to commence as part of UDAT programme
Glenmore off-road cycle route (Aviemore to Glenmore)	CNPA has offered funds to lower section which is now under construction. A funding application has been made for the middle sections	Planning application is required for the middle section and completion of agreement with the owner. A funding package has to be confirmed before work can commence.
Deeside Way	Discussions about funding options for section from Aboyne to Dinnet have taken place with Aberdeenshire Council	Confirmation of plans and securing necessary funding approvals.

13. These projects complement the very considerable progress that is being made Upper Deeside Access Trust and Angus Council through the delivery of the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project. In time the Outdoor Access Strategy will address how the approach used in such initiatives can be broadened to cover the whole of the Park. In the meantime the Integrated Grants Programme strand on Outdoor Access will provide some funding support for smaller projects.

## Ranger Services

14. The Board agreed the basic principles to be followed in developing coordinated delivery of the ranger service function across the Park in March 2005. Three options for structural change to the arrangements require to be evaluated and this work is about to commence with assistance from a firm of external consultants. A small advisory group is to be formed, chaired by a Board member, comprising ranger managers, the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association and SNH. The results of the evaluation and recommendations for changes will be reported to the Board in early 2006.
15. Meanwhile plans are in hand to upgrade the ranger base at Angus Glens and to convene the annual meeting of ranger services in December. A draft protocol to

clarify the working arrangements on outdoor access has been discussed with the four local authority ranger services and staff are optimistic that it can be agreed shortly. Guidance for the programme of countryside events for the year ahead will be issued in the autumn.

### **Visitor Information and Interpretation**

16. The Interpretation Framework was approved by the Board in April 2005 and has been extremely useful in shaping a number of practical projects including the branding of Tourist Information Centres. Two Centres have now been branded (in Grantown and Aviemore) and plans are at advanced design stage for four more. The Interpretation Framework will also be delivered through one of the strands in the Integrated Grants Programme, due to be launched in early August.

### **Entry Point Markers**

17. Most of the interim metal signs are in now place but there has been unexpected difficulties in getting the final signs installed in Aberdeenshire and Moray due to delays in the manufacture of the signs and then problems incorporating the site installation in a busy local authority work programme.
18. Work on the permanent markers is progressing well. The Scottish Executive roads department have been extremely positive about the works planned for trunk roads and it seems that they will be able to provide significant project management assistance. The Board are due to make a decision on commitment of funds in September.

### **John Muir Award**

19. The John Muir Award Project continues to go from strength to strength with almost 1000 people registered on the programme and 475 Awards presented to date. The project continues to develop the list of Award Providers in the Park which now stands at nearly 40. Experience is showing that the Award is a particularly effective and flexible way to integrate activities associated with exploring and conserving wild places with other work. For example, staff recently organised two very successful Award training sessions related to Biodiversity conservation and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, attracting around 25 participants.
20. Participants come from all sectors of the community including schools, youth organisations, women's groups and socially excluded groups. There have also been young people from disadvantaged areas of Scotland coming to learn about the Park. The possibility of establishing a fund to encourage travel by such groups is being investigated. Funding for the John Muir Award Project is only in place until October 2006 and so plans are being discussed about how to provide continuity beyond this date.

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