
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: UPDATE ON CAIRNGORMS LEADER

Prepared by: David Cameron, Corporate Services Director

Purpose

This paper updates the Board on the evolution of the Cairngorms LEADER Programme for 2014 to 2020, and follows on from previous Board consideration of the emerging LEADER Local Development Strategy at its meeting in March 2014. The update is presented to the Board at this time both to cover the significant steps forward in developing the Cairngorms LEADER programme in the six months since the Board last considered the subject.

Consideration of the paper also affords an opportunity for the Board to consider its nomination for an appointee to the newly formed CLAG, as mentioned at the June meeting.

Strategic Context

1. Establishment of the Cairngorms LEADER Programme 2014 to 2020 and consequent delivery of the Local Development Strategy over that period contributes toward National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) Strategic Outcome 1 – A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities, and the NPPP 5 year outcome that communities will become more empowered and able to develop their own models of sustainability. This work also completes NPPP work programme 4c – establish a Cairngorms LEADER fund from 2013 as part of the next LEADER programme.
2. The activities also deliver against Programme 2 of the current CNPA Corporate Plan which includes the outcome of “an active LEADER Programme contributing to the NPPP vision”.

Recommendations

3. The Board is requested to:
- a) Note the updated version of the Cairngorms Local Development Strategy as set out at Annex 1 to this paper;
 - b) Note the Cairngorms LEADER Business Plan, prepared in accordance with the Scottish Government guidance and template for such documents, as set out at Annex 2 to this paper;
 - c) Agree the Authority's nomination of a Board member to the CLAG and to agree that nominee;
 - d) Agree the ongoing commitment of the existing budget allocation of £70,000 each year to support continued part finance of the administrative and technical support provided by the Authority to the CLAG as the lead partner for Cairngorms LEADER, as a commitment for the duration of the programme and programme closure;
 - e) Note that the Corporate Services Director will act as the Vice Chair of the CLAG in continuation of the good practice established during the previous LEADER programme in supporting effective governance and communication arrangements between CLAG, the CNPA as Lead Partner, and Scottish Government as the Managing Authority;
 - f) Note the proposal for a potential £50,000 annual provision during the active period of the programme, i.e. January 2015 to December 2019, to provide a pool of public match funding and / or small grants support, for further consideration as part of developing Corporate Plan investment priorities.

Strategic Policy Considerations

4. The aim of LEADER is to increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills, and encourage innovation and co-operation to tackle local development objectives. LEADER supports community owned actions with investment from the European Union. It is based on the principles of Community Led Local Development. It is part of the Scotland Rural Development Programme, which is a European investment programme for rural development in Scotland. In addition, LEADER links local action with European and Scottish Government priorities.
5. Support for the CLAG in delivery of a new LEADER programme during 2014 to 2020 will continue the Authority's policies adopted since incorporation. The operation of the previous programme between 2007 and 2013 resulted in total

programme investment within the National Park in excess of £7 million, including an EU LEADER allocation of around £2.5 million. While final resource allocations have yet to be made by Scottish Government, a decision has been taken that each LAG area will receive a minimum allocation of £2 million.

6. Since that decision was taken, Ministers have announced the allocation of a further £20 million allocation for LEADER LAGs to deliver business start ups and farm diversification schemes in addition to the existing £60 million plus LEADER budget. Our ambition, therefore, is that support for the establishment of a LAG for Cairngorms National Park and delivery of the resultant programme will result in at least the same level of financial investment in Community Led Local Development within the Cairngorms as was seen in the previous programme.
7. The CLAG's business case set out at Annex 2 in accordance with Scottish Government's required format was submitted on 4 August. At the time of writing this paper, we have not received any feedback on the content of the business case. We hope to be able to give some update on the Scottish Government's feedback to member at the Board meeting.

Cairngorms LEADER LAG and Cairngorms Fund

8. To provide for enhancements to governance and operational arrangements in the new LEADER programme, the CLAG has agreed a governance structure which allows for the establishment of an incorporated entity which would give legal personality to Cairngorms LEADER. Given the potential for the establishment of this entity over the coming months, there is an opportunity for the Board to consider whether the operation of any "Cairngorms Fund", and stewardship of donations, might be vested in this incorporated CLAG entity. This gives an opportunity to streamline activities around project application and funding processes and would seem to provide a means of avoiding establishing a further, separate operational entity.
9. Board members' views on the merits of seeking to incorporate any development of a "Cairngorms Fund" within the evolving structures of the CLAG are sought under a separate discussion item on the current Board agenda.

Strategic Risk Management

10. Support for the development and implementation of a new LEADER Programme for the 2014 to 2020 period is a key mitigation for the strategic risk identified by the Authority that "communities within the National Park do not ... engage in delivering the NPPP" (strategic risk register, risk #8).

11. Similarly, the work acts as a key mitigation to strategic risk #16, that community capacity and leadership is not adequate to fully engage in delivery of the NPPP.
12. The strategic risk that the climate change agenda is not fully adopted into development and delivery of policies and projects also has direct mitigation through the inclusion of climate change as a key strand of activity for delivery through the LDS.
13. Furthermore, in supporting the CLAG's pursuit of the delivery of the six themes set out in the Local Development Strategy, there is a potential for a number of further more indirect mitigations to the Authority's strategic risks, in particular:
 - a) #17: role of the National Park and importance of it is not recognised by young people (key strand of LDS is to improve engagement with young people as an under-represented participant group within LEADER in the Cairngorms)
 - b) #18 and #28: "public may not be fully signed up for a low carbon economy" (low carbon is again a specific strand of activity identified within the LDS)

Implications

14. The Authority has contributed around £70,000 each year over the life of the previous LEADER programme as a financial contribution toward the costs of the underpinning administration of the programme within the National Park. This contribution has represented around 50% of the typical administrative costs with the remainder being drawn from available EU and Scottish Government funds made available to the CLAG. The LEADER business plan continues to seek this level of contribution from the CNPA for the forthcoming programme. This level of funding is covered within the Authority's current staffing budget and therefore does not represent an additional call on the Authority's finances.
15. The Authority has also made available £50,000 each year to the CLAG in the previous programme to provide a source of public match funding for key projects delivering against NPPP priorities and / or small scale projects. The CLAG has an ambition in the new programme period to provide a small grants programme independently of the technical and audit considerations involved with EU LEADER funding and may seek a contribution from the CNPA toward such a programme. This would be a matter for the Authority to consider as an element of forthcoming corporate plan and budget allocation discussions.
16. Taking on the lead partner role for a LEADER Local Action Group does confer some potential liabilities on an organisation, as both an employer of the LAG

Administration Team, and from a financial perspective where the lead organisation could ultimately be exposed to clawback of ineligible funding should recovery actions against project funding recipients be unsuccessful for any reason. Nationally, there have been a range of audit issues raised around the delivery of LEADER across Scotland during the current programme period, 2007 to 2013. History and the ongoing complex and technical nature of LEADER funding suggests that this risk is a real one, although the various audit and monitoring visits to Cairngorms LEADER has to date been relatively positive. The requirement to ensure that appropriate internal control and appraisal arrangements are in place for a new LEADER programme and operating effectively should therefore be added to the Authority's Strategic Risk Register in recognition of this.

Success Measures

17. Final approval of the LDS and LEADER Business Plan by the Scottish Government as the Managing Authority for LEADER in Scotland is the first success measure for this programme.
18. The level of allocated funding to the Cairngorms LAG in comparison with national budgets and previous allocation levels will represent a further measure of success.
19. The CLAG is seeking to adopt a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the outputs gained from LEADER investment in the Cairngorms, monitor progress made against the LDS themes and also establish the contribution made to the national outcomes for LEADER established by Scottish Government. The key indicators included in this programme monitoring and evaluation framework, supplemented by project specific indicators, will provide the means of measuring the success of the programme.

David Cameron

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davidcameron@cairngorms.co.uk