

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR INFORMATION

**Title: OPERATIONAL PLAN 2005/06 QUARTER 3 - UPDATE**

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#### **Purpose**

To present a review of progress on the 2005/06 Operational Plan.

#### **Recommendation**

The Board is requested to note the progress made to date on 2005/06 Operational Plan actions, and in particular that:

- Progress on 15 of 20 goals remains broadly in line with intentions set out in the Operational Plan.
- Two of the three goals highlighted in previous reports as at increased risk to delivery of intended outcomes have now been brought back into line with plans.
- Five goals are now each been identified as affected by some changes to the timetable and/or intended delivery plans, which pose some risk to delivery of intended outcomes.
- The results of the Operational Plan review mirror the finance monitoring position considered by the Board's Finance Committee in December, with some slippage in activity and associated expenditure across a range of operational plan goals.
- Plans are being developed to bring these aspects of the operational plan back on track as far as possible before the end of the year.
- Overall, this third quarterly review of the 2005/06 Operational Plan continues to present generally successful work and resource investment in delivering operational and, ultimately, corporate plan objectives.

#### **Executive Summary**

The Operational Plan sets out a range of actions, and milestones associated with these actions, which contribute over the course of 2005/06 to the ultimate delivery of the 20 Corporate Plan goals over the next few years. The Management Team's review of the 2005/06 Operational Plan has sought to identify whether planned activities remain broadly on target in terms of timetable and delivery of intended outcomes, or whether, for any reason, there is any risk of actions not being delivered within target timescales.

The main focus has been on actions where milestones were planned to be achieved by the end of the third quarter of 2005/06, i.e. by 31 December. Additionally, the opportunity has also been taken to look forward and highlight any issues relating to delivery of future planned outcomes. The Management Team has adopted a "traffic light" system of categorising

progress, with each action classes as green, amber or red depending on the level of risk attached to delivery of intended outcomes.

The monitoring process has highlighted that two of three goals previously assessed with an increased risk of non-delivery (amber) have now been brought back into line with plans over the third quarter. The review indicates that progress on 15 of 20 goals is broadly in line with intentions set out in the Operational Plan. Progress on five goals is now classed as amber as a consequence of delays in a number of associated activities.

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## OPERATIONAL PLAN 2005/06 QUARTER 3 - UPDATE

### Background

1. The Operational Plan for 2005/06 was presented to the Board for information at its meeting in April. This plan stems from the Corporate Plan for 2005/06 to 2007/08, approved by the Board in February.
2. The Corporate Plan sets out 20 goals identifying the outcomes to which the Authority will direct its resources over the three years to 2008. The goals will not all be completed over the course of the current three year corporate planning period: progress will be made on all goals over this time and further direction will be given by the National Park Plan. Of the 20 goals, 7 have been identified as taking priority given that they are statutory duties and/or in most cases will provide the strategic framework which will guide activities within the Park for the next 10 years or so.
3. The Operational Plan sets out a range of actions, and milestones associated with these actions, which contribute over the course of 2005/06 to the ultimate delivery of the 20 Corporate Plan goals over the next few years.
4. The Management Team has now undertaken a third review of the operational plan for 2005/06. This review has sought to identify whether planned activities remain broadly on target in terms of timetable and delivery of intended outcomes, or whether, for any reason, there is any risk of actions not being delivered within target timescales.
5. The results of the previous two reviews were reported to the Board at its meetings on 1 July and 7 October, and this paper follows broadly the same format.

### 2005/06 Operational Plan Review Process

6. In reviewing the status of delivery of operational plan actions, the Management Team have used a three way system of categorisation:
  - a) Green: action being delivered broadly in line with timetable and intended milestones/outcomes envisaged in operational plan.
  - b) Amber: there are some changes to the timetable and/or intended delivery plans which pose some risk to delivery of intended outcomes.
  - c) Red: changes to timetable and/or delivery plans pose a significant risk to delivery of intended outcomes.
7. At this stage, the main focus has been on actions where milestones were planned to be achieved by the end of the third quarter of 2005/06, i.e. by 31 December. Additionally, the opportunity has also been taken to look forward and highlight any issues relating to delivery of outcomes intended in the latter part of the year.
8. Following from the review of the status of actions, the status of the goals to which the actions contribute have also been categorised as green, amber or red. This is intended to provide some early indication of progress being made on three-year Corporate Plan goals through delivery of 2005/06 operational plans.

9. Assessing the delivery status of goals also attempts to take some account of the fact that not all actions will make an equal contribution to the achievement of goals. Rather, some actions will be of lower priority, and it may be appropriate as the year progresses to halt delivery of the outcomes intended by those actions in order to prioritise others and ensure overall contribution to delivery of goals is maximised.

## Results of Review Process

10. The Appendix to this paper sets out the Operational Plan, with actions colour coded according to the above broad guidelines, together with a brief commentary on progress to date. As indicated, focus has been concentrated on actions with milestones due for achievement in the period to 31 December. Some actions, with milestones/outcomes not due until the final quarter of the year, may not have any indication of progress at this stage.
11. Results of the first two operational plan monitoring exercises indicated that 3 of 20 operational plan goals were classed as “amber” as a result of increased risk of non-delivery of a number of actions within them. Results of the current monitoring exercise now indicate that activities on two of these three goals are now broadly back on target and accordingly no longer highlighted in this way. These two goals now shown as “green” and broadly on target are:
  - a) Increased access to all forms of housing tenure for park residents or people who are meeting economic or social needs within the Park (Priority 1).
  - b) Good understanding and appreciation of the Cairngorms National Park by young people, and appreciation of its importance (Priority 2).
12. Five of the twenty goals are now classified as amber as a result of a balance of actions within those goals showing some changes to the timetable and/or intended delivery plans which pose some risk to delivery of intended outcomes. Only one of these goals is a Priority 1 area. Those five goals are considered below.
13. **Delivery of an effective and efficient development control service, seamlessly blending planning policy and Park aims (Priority 1).** At present the operational plan sets out only a single action within this goal, focusing on achieving a reduction in application backlogs by October. The plan reviews have indicated that, since the appointment of a third development control officer, the backlog has been steadily reducing but taking longer to clear than had been estimated. The Operational Plan review now indicates that, while officers have substantially tackled the backlog and processed the majority of older applications, this activity has continued to be highlighted as amber as performance measures will not be ready until January 2006.
14. **Good quality outdoor access infrastructure in place and maintained (Priority 2).** Comments on activities within this goal highlight difficulties which have been encountered over the past few months in finalising plans for financial investment in various outdoor access infrastructure projects. These activities are typically dependent on multi-partner funding. Delays in finalising projects, total funding and securing contractors have led to slippage in the Authority’s planned investment programme. This reflects part of the slippage in the Authority’s total expenditure reviewed by the Board’s Finance Committee and commented on further in a later section of this paper.

15. **Wide range of opportunities to experience the special qualities of the Park in a sustainable manner is available to all (Priority 2).** While good progress is being made across a range of actions contributing to this goal, it is now highlighted as amber as a result of delays in some areas occurring over the third quarter of the year. The comments in the Annex to this paper indicate that some delay has arisen in developing a visitor information website, developing publications on recreation opportunities, supporting third party interpretation projects and developing plans for road signage within the Park.
16. **Good communication and consultation by land managers on objective setting for public benefits (Priority 2).** Comments under this goal highlight a refocusing of activities within the second half of 2005/06, reflecting the current level of staff resources available. Budget proposals approved by the Finance Committee in December provide for additional staff resource in this area to be recruited for 2006/07.
17. **Stronger and more diverse economic opportunities within the CNP area (Priority 2).** While the majority of activities within this goal remain on target, it is now highlighted as at some increased risk as a result of delays in some strands of work. It is anticipated that actions on developing a Youth Apprenticeship Scheme and a Sustainable Business Development Strategy may still be completed before the end of the year.
18. All 15 other goals are, therefore, categorised as green and progressing broadly in line with the operational plan's intentions.
19. The position three quarters of the way into the year does, therefore, reflect some changes to previously reported delivery of operational plans. It is important to bear in mind the overall context of this operational plan monitoring update, as seeking to reflect progress over the first of three years in delivering outcomes sought in the Corporate Plan. The detail of the Operational Plan review for 2005/06 indicates that there has been an increasing number of goals affected by delays in delivery of underpinning actions. The status of the seven top-priority goals does, however, show an improvement over the last quarter. Overall, achievements in 2005/06 to date, continues to indicate that delivery of goals agreed in the Corporate Plan remains broadly in line with intentions.

## **Delivering Sustainability, A Park for All and Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness**

20. Delivery of the three cross-cutting themes agreed within the Corporate Plan remain core elements against which Operational Plan activities are proofed as they are taken forward.

## **Implications**

### ***Financial Implications***

21. The Finance Committee met on 2 December 2005 and considered the current budget monitoring position. The Committee noted its concern that expenditure levels on

activities in the current year were well below that budgeted for at this stage of the year. Accordingly, the Committee recorded its expectation that a number of planned activities dependent on expenditure to secure outcomes and milestones, whether through out-sourced or partnership activities, may be highlighted as at some increased risk of non-delivery in the year in the next report update report to the Board. This expectation has been borne out by the comments set out previously in this paper, with an increased number of goals highlighted at some heightened risk through slippage in activity and associated slippage in financial commitments.

22. The Committee also noted that its experience in monitoring 2004-05 expenditure, which also had a relatively similar expenditure position at this stage in the year, does give some confidence that expenditure levels can increase substantially towards the end of the financial year. Current outturn projections established following recent meetings between Corporate Services and Heads of Group indicate that this will again be the case for 2005-06.
23. A process has now been put in place to establish action plans and milestones covering the remainder of this financial year for projects with significant budget implications. This seeks to ensure that attention is focused on achieving as far as possible intended delivery aims and undertaking investment plans in line with budgets over the remaining part of the year.

### ***Presentational Implications***

24. Overall, this third quarterly review of the 2005/06 Operational Plan continues to present generally successful work and resource investment in delivering operational and, ultimately, corporate plan objectives. It is acknowledged that a number of actions have fallen behind schedule over the third quarter, primarily as a result of the complexities of finalising multi-partner projects. Evidence of officers addressing delays highlighted in previous reports is shown by delivery of two goals now back on target, following their being previously shown at an increased level of risk.
25. Therefore, the Authority is able to report continued successful delivery of its Corporate Plan objectives over the first nine months of 2005/06, often involving working with and through others, maximising the effect of its relatively small limited resources by acting as a catalyst, a co-ordinator, and enabler.

### ***Implications for Stakeholders***

26. In working with and through others in meeting the Authority's objectives to date, other stakeholders will also benefit from that process of co-ordination and joined-up activity. There is, therefore, some confidence that in delivering our operational plan for the year, the Authority will also be contributing to the wider delivery objectives for a range of stakeholders with an interest in the Cairngorms National Park area.

### **Next Steps**

27. A final review of the status of the 2005/06 Operational Plan delivery will be presented to the Board at its meeting in April 2006. In the meantime, the Management Team will continue to review of the robustness of financial allocations made to progress

operational plan actions, reinforce the need to adhere to delivery schedules wherever possible and consider any new investment plans proposed. Financial reviews will be undertaken in conjunction with the Board's Finance Committee as appropriate.

28. Having highlighted areas where delivery is at some risk, officers will also seek to bring those actions back on track where possible while continuing progress on the other, vast majority of areas, which are currently running to plan.
29. Work also remains to be undertaken to fully embed the Authority's risk management processes within these operational plan reviews. This was considered by the Board's Audit Committee in December and a further report on this area will be brought to that Committee in March 2006.

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**December 2005**

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