

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: PARK PLAN UPDATE

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Purpose

To update Members on progress with the Park Plan and to seek their agreement to informal workshops on 17th February and 3rd and 4th March 2005.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- note the progress to date on developing the Park Plan;
- agree to hold a workshop in February to discuss the special qualities of the area and a vision for the future; and
- agree to hold a series of workshops in early March to consider the issue papers and draft strategic objectives.

Executive Summary

At the Board meeting in July 2004, the Board approved a revised timetable, contents and overall approach to preparing the Park Plan. Since then we have made progress on the first two phases of gathering baseline factual information; undertaking policy context analysis; developing visions; engaging with external stakeholders; identifying key issues and strategic objectives; and identifying health indicators.

Progress on some fronts had been hampered by a number of operational issues including a vacancy in the Park Plan Officer post. However, we are still on course to meet the agreed timetable and present issue papers to the Board in April.

We consider it important that all Board members have opportunities to consider in the detail the key elements of the Plan at this stage – the statement on the Park's special qualities; the vision for the Park; and the issue papers. To that end, we are proposing a series of informal workshops to present this material and seek members' input.

PARK PLAN UPDATE

Introduction

1. At the Board meeting in July 2004, Members agreed a revised timetable, contents and overall approach for the completion of the first Park Plan. This developed an earlier discussion by the Board in September 2003.
2. The first two stages of the process involved gathering together existing information about the Park into a State of the Park Report; preparing a vision for the Park; examining the existing policy context; and then drawing these together into a series of the issue papers that identify strategic objectives for the Park. As a related exercise, we also agreed to identify a series of indicators by which we can assess the overall progress of the Park in meeting its four aims.
3. The purpose of this paper is to report progress since July 2004 on the main blocks of work and to seek approval for a series of workshops with members to explore the outcome of this work in more detail before seeking formal approval of the vision and strategic objectives in April.

Progress Update

4. Overall progress has been slower than anticipated due to a number of operational constraints, principally due to an eight-month vacancy in the Park Plan Officer post. However, in recent months, a new Park Plan Officer has started and we have dedicated more resources to drive forward these first two stages. As a result, we are now back on course to meet the important milestone in April 2005 to present the theme issue papers and draft strategic objectives to the Board.
5. Progress on the initial components is as follows:

State of the Park Report

6. This work was let to a consortium led by the Rural Development Company in April 2004. Progress has been slower than anticipated, and early drafts have not been up to standard. However, we are now working more closely with the consultants and are confident that improvements are in hand to deliver improved working papers by the end of January 2005, in time to feed into the next stages of the process.

Health Indicators

7. The Rural Development Company is also contracted to develop the “health indicators” for the Park, and we expect to receive a first draft by the end of February 2005.

Policy Context

8. We have continued to develop our understanding of the existing policy context in which the Park operates. Most of this work has been done in house, and some has already been shared with members through informal Briefing Papers. As well as considering the current policy context, we have analysed public consultations about the National Park

since 1998 and the Parliamentary debates leading up to the designation of the Cairngorms National Park so that we can incorporate significant issues into the Park Plan process.

Public Funding Streams Review

9. We have recently appointed Hall Aitken to draw together information about how much the public sector spends in the Park, what this buys, and what impact this has on the four aims of the Park. This will help us to begin to identify where the public sector can be more joined-up and effective in its delivery of the Park Plan.
10. This is a complicated piece of work as the consultant will need to synthesise data from a number of different public bodies, much of which will have been collected for different administrative areas. Nonetheless, we hope to have initial results by early March 2005.

Special Qualities

11. The Board recognised during its first consideration of the Park Plan in September 2003 that the Plan would need to identify clearly the particular qualities that make the area special. These are the qualities that led to the designation of the National Park and which we need to conserve and enhance as they underpin all 4 aims of the Park.
12. The State of the Park Report is drawing together information about the particular elements that make the area special. However, we recognise that facts and figures are only part of the story and so we have undertaken a separate exercise to identify a more comprehensive expression of special qualities. These range from the natural and cultural to the aesthetic and spiritual, and in many cases the special nature of the area results from a combination of these.
13. In drafting this statement of the Park's special qualities, we have not undertaken any further primary research, but instead have drawn on the recent public meetings and questionnaire to inform the Local Plan; the development of the Brand Wheel; consultations leading up to the establishment of the Park; and other publications.
14. This statement of the Park's special qualities is an important element of the Park Plan and we consider it important that members have an opportunity to consider it in some detail before formally considering it for approval in April 2005.

Vision

15. Work to develop a vision for the Park, looking 20-25 years ahead and with particular emphasis on our vision for the special qualities of the Park, has been progressing in house. This vision is firmly rooted in reality, and considers what is possible given where we are now and our best understanding of the major trends on the area, for example climate change and demographic change.
16. We are now ready to share initial drafts with members, and as with the statement of special qualities, we feel that it is important for all members to have the opportunity to consider drafts informally first.

Recommendation:

- 17. We recommend that all members attend an informal workshop on 17th February 2005 to consider a statement of the special qualities of the Park, and a vision statement looking 20-25 years ahead**

Issue Papers

18. All the work outlined above will be brought together in a series of issue papers which recommend the Plan's strategic objectives. We are preparing these to a common format for each of the individual topics identified in the Plan. The template and guidance to which we are working is contained for your information at Annex 1.
19. When complete there will be in the region of 25-30 papers, each between 7 and 20 pages long. They will contain a large amount of material, and we consider it important that members have ample time to consider these and the opportunity to discuss the detail informally before considering the package of papers formally at the Board meeting in April 2005.
20. We propose to complete first drafts of these issue papers in late February 2005.

Recommendation:

- 21. We recommend that all members attend a series of workshops on 3rd and 4th March 2005 to consider the issue papers under the themes of Communities Living and Working in the Park; Conserving and Enhancing the Park; and Understanding and Enjoying the Park.**

Other Considerations

Involving External Stakeholders

22. The Board has repeatedly emphasised the importance of involving external stakeholders in all our work; as an enabling body we have to work through others to help manage the National Park.
23. This involvement is now well underway, and as you will see from the template in the annex, we have included an explicit declaration of who has been involved in the preparation of each issue papers. This is designed to ensure an open and inclusive approach, as well as to highlight where there are differences of opinion.
24. How we engage with stakeholders varies across the organisations, and is part of a longer process of building sound working relationships built on trust and mutual respect. These relationships will take time to develop. We therefore expect to receive views and additional information from our partners on an on-going basis; and where this suggests a material change to the draft Park Plan, we will bring it back to the Board for members' consideration.
25. We are using a number of mechanisms to engage with stakeholders, including the new Advisory Forums as agreed by the Board in August 2004, as well as a series of bilateral

meetings with organisations, and topic-focused discussions. At the more strategic level, we propose to convene the second meeting of the Panel on Joined-Up Government in May or June 2005 in order to review progress and seek their buy-in to the draft strategic objectives and health indicators.

Local Plan

26. We are continuing to evolve the Park Plan and Local Plan in a complementary way so that the final Local Plan will be consistent with the Park Plan, and that work on both will inform the other. The joined-up timetable reflects this – the Preliminary Draft of the Local Plan will be published once the Board has agreed the draft strategic objectives for the Park Plan; and the formal consultation on the Park Plan and deposit stage of the Local Plan will be run together in the Spring of 2006. We have discussed this in detail with the Scottish Executive and they are content.

Sustainability Appraisal

27. As reported in the July 2004 Board paper, we are considering developing a Sustainability Appraisal as an integrating tool to ensure that the potential impact on the 4 aims of the Park of all our plans, including the Park Plan and Local Plan, are assessed explicitly and openly. This would also enable us to comply with the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment.
28. We will bring a paper to the Board in February 2005 explaining this in more detail and seeking the Board's approval.

Landscape Character Assessment

29. The original Park Plan Working Group identified the need for an updated and broadened Landscape Character Assessment. We are currently considering this for the next financial year.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

30. We expect the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority to publish for consultation their draft Park Plan in the Spring of this year. We have followed broadly similar approaches but we have not yet seen their consultation draft. Once this is published, we will need to reflect on how we present our material given the expectations their work will have created.

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