
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

Prepared by: GRANT MOIR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose:

- I. 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:

- a) **Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy:** The challenge now is to encourage more landowners to pick up on the strategy's vision and objectives and to follow the guidance it provides. With this in mind we are developing a 'challenge fund' to help encourage more woodland creation in the National Park. The funding would *help* to cover the costs of bird, peat depth surveys etc that would inform a grant application to Scottish Forestry.
- b) **Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework:** See Caper Update Paper
- c) **East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership:** Collectively progress is being made. We had a very positive discussion with gamekeepers from the six estates along with representatives from the Heather Trust and Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust to observe and discuss muirburn on Delnadamph Estate. Currently we are negotiating discussions on achieving more detailed raptor monitoring across all of the estates.
- d) **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership:** 2019 is set to be the busiest year of all for TGLP with a number of very challenging major projects set to be carried out. Work has started on stabilising Blairfindy Castle. The Scalan mills project has received planning permission and work has started on site. The Speyside Way Spur work has also started. Already we are seeing local economic benefits from the Dark Sky Park designation. The river restoration projects (slowing the flow and water margin management, both relying on the support and complex funding requirements of a number of partners) continue to be challenging but we are confident, based on successes to date that we will see more exciting projects in place in the next few months. Overall there are 20 projects being undertaken by the Partnership.
- e) **Cairngorms Nature:** The launch of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2019 – 2024 was celebrated at a Holyrood reception on 21st February, hosted by Graeme

Dey and attended by 30 senior staff from NPPP partners. This followed three days of promotion at a stand in the garden lobby when over 30 MSPs came and chatted to CNPA staff about conservation and sustainable land management in the Park. The Holyrood reception was followed up with a local launch, shared with the launch of the Forest Strategy, on 1st March. It was well attended by project staff from partner agencies and organisations with direct responsibility for delivery. A bid for funding Cairngorms Nature activity has been submitted to the SNH Biodiversity Challenge Fund. The wildlife tracker project is ongoing but has been delayed to winter 2019 to ensure the technology is robust.

- f) **Peatland Action:** The Cairngorms Peatland Action Project Officers continue to deliver restoration management across the National Park with 13 projects targeting over 1100 hectares of peatland with a budget of £1.48 million in 2018/19. Eight of these projects will complete by the end of March, with weather and contractor capacity delaying the other five. Funding has been applied for to get 2500 hectares of degraded peatland across 9 sites into restoration management this year. The national budget for Peatland Action is £3m so competition will be high for funds.
- g) **Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group:** The group met for the first time in March. The meeting set out the group's purpose and a number of key topics were lightly touched upon. It was agreed future meetings would focus on only two or three topics so that they could be more fully covered. It was agreed that a small sub-group would look into pulling together best practice guidance on ATV use in the National Park to be covered in more detail at the next meeting in Sept/Oct 2019.
- h) **Deer Management:** The effectiveness of deer management planning by Deer Management Groups across Scotland has been assessed by SNH with a report due later this year. Deer management in important designated sites in the National Park is being especially closely scrutinised. The Scottish Government Deer Working Group is due to report soon. We can expect deer management in the news again later this summer.
- i) **Moorland Management:** The Scottish Government grouse moor management group has examined the environmental impact of grouse moor management practices such as muirburn, use of medicated grit and mountain hare culls, and will be advising on the option of licensing grouse shooting businesses in the near future.
- j) **Wildlife Estates Scotland:** CNPA is a strong supporter of this initiative which aims to promote best practice and give credit where credit is due. Any accreditation process is complex and with all the partners involved, we are doing our best to help ensure that WES becomes a very clear, recognisable and meaningful brand.
- k) **Climate Change:** The 1st phase report of historical snow patterns in the Cairngorms has been received from JHI. The second phase looking at future trends is being worked on with Scottish Government, JHI and the ClimateXChange, Edinburgh Centre for carbon Innovation as part of RESAS funding secured by CNPA.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum:** First meeting of the ‘restructured’ group will be late June early July focussing on our 2019 Tread Lightly campaign that focuses on key access issues; dogs, fires & camping, biking and litter. The autumn meeting will invite a wider range of partners to consider how we better promote responsible access to both users and managers.
- b) **Long Distance Routes:**
 - i. **Speyside Way:** Planning consent & funding is in now in place from Low Carbon Travel and Transport (LCTT) Challenge Fund to complete the ‘new build’ to Newtonmore by Autumn 2019. The route is now built, signed and in use from Kincaig to Drumuish and with finical support from SNH the section between Aviemore and Boat of Garten was improved in March 2019. In addition to path construction in 2019 work on signage, interpretation and creating a start/finish point at Newtonmore will be undertaken. The route development is being led by CNPA with support from Highland and Moray Councils.
 - ii. **Deeside Way:** Planning consent for the path line from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge has been granted. However, our principle community link funding support Sustrans are now only funding multi-use tarmac paths so other sources of funding will need to be secured to build this section.
- c) **Mountains and People Project:** The five year Mountains and People project within both National Parks in Scotland is approaching its final year. Some 35.4 km of mountain path upgrades are complete comprising 67% of 53km total scheduled in the project. The most noticeable path being rebuilt in this final stage is that climbing Beinn a Ghlo seen from A9 at Blair Atholl. CNPA are working with OATS to maintain a sustainable legacy at the end of the project in both path maintenance and public involvement through volunteering.
- d) **Active Aviemore:** The first phase of detailed, costed, designs for the multiuse path will be produced for the area in and around the new hospital. These will be undertaken in 2019 and will include local consultation. In addition **Kingussie** and **Dalnain** communities have secured Sustrans funding to develop proposals for improving multi-use access in and around the communities. The Kingussie work is linking to Speyside Way and NCN7 and Dalnain looking for a multiuse path link to Grantown that also embraces the potential to link with the proposed new distillery and any extension of the Steam Railway. **Laggan** is at the early stage of looking at options to improve access to Newtonmore. The communities of western Cairngorms met earlier this year to make sure that these projects and work on A9 dualling are linked.
- e) **Glenmore:** In partnership with Forestry and Land Scotland we have submitted a successful bid to the Visit Scotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to construct a multi-use path through Glenmore linking car parks, visitor attractions and the path network. Detailed design is being dealt with by the roads authority and does not require to go through the planning permission process. Build is scheduled for

autumn 2019 and will be managed by FLS. FLS are still redeveloping their 'visitor management' plan with public consultation planned for 2019.

- f) **Volunteering:** To date 14 trained volunteer rangers are continuing to support the work of six partner ranger services and have contributed 425 days of very valuable volunteering. Training for 12 new volunteer rangers started in May 2019 aiming to have then ready to volunteer this summer. A further training is scheduled for early spring 2020. An awareness raising day in Carr-bridge in February attracted nearly a hundred participants linking volunteers with some 20 providers across the National Park. Overall this significant output helped secure an additional 10 months funding from Leader+ to take initial project to nearly four years.
- g) **Education and Inclusion:** Following Board decision in December work developing the Europarc Youth Manifesto into sustainable engagement with young people is underway. Leader+ funding support partnership with Finish young people has already lead to two further workshops; one in Finland in April and Cairngorms in May. How we support and effectively use the Cairngorms Youth Action Team will be coming to Board in September 2019. 'Into the Mountain' and 'Writer in Residence' projects are encouraging people to creatively celebrate the outstanding culture of Cairngorms. Both projects are supported by Creative Scotland, with Woodland Trust supporting the 'Writer' programme. Supported by both CNPA and SNH Backbone is applying Heritage Lottery support for an 'Our Natural Heritage' project to encourage refugees and migrants to enjoy Cairngorms.
- h) **Information and Interpretation:** National Park interpretation is being installed in two key visitor attractions; Landmark in Carr-Bridge and Speyside Centre in Dulnain Bridge. New, 2019 versions of Welcome, Tread Lightly and Explore for A Day leaflets & sponsored tear off map are being produced and Gaelic Place Names, Hill Paths widely circulated.
- i) **Snow Roads Scenic Route:** CBP has secured Visit Scotland Growth Fund support to deliver an £80k project that uses the SnowRoads to target international buyers in France, Germany, Scandinavia and North America for the first time, encouraging them to list the Cairngorms for travellers who design their own itineraries and arrange their own travel plans. Staff and Board members attended CBP Spring Conference which was themed on Snow Roads.

Rural Development:

- a) **Local Development Plan 2020:** Consultation on the Proposed LDP finished on 5 April 2019. We received 207 formal responses to the proposed Plan. The use of videos and photographs alongside social media as part of the consultation, generated significantly more interest than any other CNPA campaign yet. The level of participation and interaction with material should have helped dispel myths and provide facts about the Plan that might otherwise lead to objections. The responses are now being analysed and will be reported to the Board in August before submission to the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) for examination by a Reporter.

- b) **Planning casework:** The Planning Committee have approved planning applications to further extend the Speyside Way towards Kingussie, redevelop the site of the former Spittal of Glenshee Hotel, new healthcare facility in Aviemore and, recently, new tourism accommodation in Strathdon. During February, Speymalt Whisky Distributors, the parent company of Gordon and Macphail, held a public exhibition in Grantown-on-Spey for their proposed new distillery south of the town. CNPA drew together the promoters of four potentially positive developments near Grantown – the steam railway extension, the A95 trunk road upgrade, the new distillery and the community path link to Dulnain Bridge.
- c) **Cairngorms Business Barometer:** The Cairngorms Business Barometer for Q4 for 2018 showed a reduction in customers and turnover compared to previous quarters. There was also a decrease in business confidence compared to previous quarters and many businesses were concerned about being unable to fill vacancies. CBP noted that the funicular closure and consequent negative national publicity about the area was likely to have played a significant role. Meanwhile the overall level of support provided to businesses from a range of organisations was well above average for recent periods. Report is available here <https://visitcairngorms.com/barometer>.
- d) **Economic Action Plan:** The Board approved the Action Plan in December and we are due to go out to consultation in June. This has been delayed to refine the actions with partners and to avoid overlap and potential for confusion with the LDP consultation.
- e) **Tourism Action Plan:** The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership met in late May and discussed the work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, plans to develop a Tourism Business Improvement District in Moray and early ideas for a new long distance route linking Deeside and Strathspey. Overall good progress is being made with delivery of the Action Plan. The visitor survey 2019/20 is now underway with interim results expected at the end of the year. CNPA now has 10 agreements with Local Information Centres across the National Park. The centres are all promoted on our website, maps and appropriate publications and we are working with them to install the brand, information and interpretation. All have participated in 'Make it Yours' training.
- f) **Affordable Housing Delivery:** Staff and Board members attended the Rural Housing Conference in Birnam in early March. The following week a positive meeting took place of our Community-led Housing Group, involving representatives from Aviemore, Dulnain Bridge, Boat of Garten, Carrbridge, Tomintoul, Kincaig, Braemar and Ballater. A number of those communities are actively scoping community housing projects with the support of CNPA, Highland Small Communities Housing Trust and Rural Housing Scotland, all making use of the Scottish Government's Rural Housing Fund to progress their plans.
- g) **A9 Dualling project:** CNPA removed its objection to the proposals at Killiecrankie where additional survey information had been collected and Historic Environment Scotland were satisfied. On the Dalraddy to Slochd section CNPA considers the provision for non-motorised users between Aviemore and Carrbridge

is insufficient and has objected. Transport Scotland are currently leading a study to look at route options for new path provision although the meetings to take this forwards have been delayed.

- h) **Community-led development:** Staff continue to support community-led project development throughout the Park. The Highland Wildlife Park and Braemar Castle have been successful in their NLHF bids but Am Fasgah were not successful on this occasion. Staff continue to support Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and the Marr Area Partnership in their CDO roles and supported recent Community Action Planning work in Kingussie. CNPA facilitated meetings to assist Laggan Forest Trust take forwards their plans to expand their role in recreation and forest management. The Association of Cairngorms Communities, and their associated Planning Representatives Network, met earlier in March.
- i) **Badenoch Great Place Project:** Project is now well established and multiple project lines are being progressed. Work on the Interpretation & Marketing Strategy is well under way and proposals are emerging for stronger place-based branding of the area based on the potential to tell stories about heritage a connections to the land. The work to scope an alternative tourist route for Badenoch has been slightly delayed but is also progressing well. Arts competition has started and Gaelic place-names project due to start very soon. Project staff also participated in a gathering of all nine projects in Scotland to share experience and best practice in heritage-based place-making
- j) **Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund:** Four applications have been submitted within the Park for this fund that is managed by SNH: by RSPB for visitor facilities at Abernethy; by Highlife Highland for youth facilities at Folk Park, by RZSS for visitor facilities at Wildlife park and by a local community group for an observatory near Tomintoul. Decision should be made by September 2019.
- k) **Strengthening Communities Conference, 27 to 28 May in Aviemore:** CNPA Board members and staff attended the conference where the National Park had a high profile with presence at marketplace, several speakers (including Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Badenoch Great Place Project) and the Convener welcoming guests at dinner. CNPA also organised two very successful significant Fringe Events for local stakeholders focused on key rural development issues in the Park: Involving young people, rural broadband (R100 project), community-led housing delivery and community engagement in land management.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) There has been a range of stakeholder engagement meetings including meetings with Vince Tough - Police Scotland, Sarah Jane Laing - SLE, Jim Valentine – P&K Council, Stephen Archer – Aberdeenshire Council, Donna Manson – Highland Council, Debbie Long – SE LINK, SG RESAS, James Hutton Institute & OATS Board members

- b) The Board evening in Aviemore attracted about 20 people to come along and discuss issues in the area.
- c) The CEO has attended EELG, CoHI Chief Officers Group, NPPP Delivery Group Scottish Leaders Forum, ENFOR Awayday, PAW Scotland Plenary Group and Funicular Response Group.
- d) There has been a number of other stakeholder events covered in other parts of this report

Communications:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign:** The Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend took place 10 – 13 May with over 100 events across the Park. Evaluation of the event is underway and early signs are very positive with over 3,000 people across the Park getting out into our amazing landscapes and nature, over 400 school children involved in the art competition and the rural skills day, 6 private estates, 2 farms, 10 ranger services, 17 private businesses and 18 organisations and projects involved.
- b) **Make It Yours Campaign:** Some 360 visitor facing staff across the National Park have participated in this training programme that shares why the Cairngorms is designated a National Park, its special qualities and, using the 2014/15 visitor survey data, looks at the experiences and information people are likely to want. The Gaelic as an Asset online toolkit will be launched during the summer to encourage businesses and community groups to offer Gaelic experiences in the Park.
- c) **Active Cairngorms:** The e-trike initiative was launched in May to be trialled initially in Aviemore with the potential for this to be increased in other communities across the Park. The Outdoor Access Code was promoted throughout April with a specific focus on keeping dogs under control during lambing and bird nesting season. In September we will focus on promoting recreation in the park and the contribution it can make to people's health and wellbeing.
- d) **Corporate Communications:** Work is underway to prepare the National Park Partnership Plan progress report and the CNPA's Annual Review due to be published in the summer. The Economic Development Action Plan is also being prepared to go out for consultation from June – September.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project:** Staff are still adapting to the new working environment. There have been several opportunities for staff to comment on the extension and these suggestions are currently being considered. With regards the old building, architects have been appointed to review and redesign the meeting and informal space. We also have plans to redecorate the building
- b) **Staffing update:** Since March, staff turnover and recruitment has been as follows:
 - i. Ross Elder's internship in the Communications team came to an end.

- ii. Ryan Dziadowiec's fixed term contract as Gaelic Language Plan assistant ended on 31st March.
 - iii. Frances Thin (Landscape Adviser) retired.
 - iv. Graham Saunders (Landscape Adviser) resigned and recruitment for this post is currently live
 - v. Viv Roach (Corporate Support Officer) resigned and recruitment for this post is currently live.
 - vi. Recruitment for the 4 Planning Officer posts to replace staff promotions, moves and maternity leave (2 x Planning Officers Development Planning; 1 x Planning Officer Development Management; 1 x Graduate Planner) has now closed and interviews are being held in June.
 - vii. We are recruiting a Strathspey Farmland Wader Officer, which is a new fixed term post, funded through the Strathspey Wetlands and Wader Initiative.
- c) **Youth Employment:** : On-going commitment to supporting Youth Employment, as follows:
- i. Rhiannon Holden was appointed to the 3-month internship, to collate accurate information on where there are currently hill tracks across the National Park. This internship commenced in May.
 - ii. We have a Project Scotland volunteer joining our IT team for a 10 week placement over the summer.
 - iii. We are supporting UHI with two work placements as follows:
 - A B.Sc. (Hons) Geography student spent 4 weeks in April working with staff in the following teams: - Conservation, HLF project, Peatland project, Land Management advisers, Outdoor Access and Planning
 - A B.Sc. (Hons) Environmental Science student will spend 2 weeks in October doing a similar but contracted version of the above placement.
- d) **Organisational Development Strategy 2:** Following several staff engagement events, including the Staff Away Day, Mental Health Training, and Management Training, together with a review of recent SCF discussions and organisational change analysis, we have pulled together a draft for the next Organisational Development Strategy (ODS3). This will be discussed with the Staffing and Recruitment Committee and consulted with staff. Once completed, the ODS3 will direct organisational change activity over the coming 18 months.
- e) **Shared Services:** Shared services as follows: -
- i. 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 2019/20 pay remit, which has recently been approved.
 - ii. We have also supported SNH by providing a member of staff on a short-term secondment to support their pension data cleanse exercise.
- f) **UKNP:** Cairngorms NPA continues to lead on the establishment of a national charity to support the work of National Park Partnerships in seeking corporate support for the activities within National Parks. We have now secured the registration of the "UK National Parks Charity Foundation" with the Charities Commission for England and Wales. Work is ongoing to register the entity with the Office of the Charities Commission in Scotland as the final step in establishing the

charity's capacity to work across Scotland, Wales and England. A wider update on work with UK National Parks is set out in a separate update paper to this Board meeting.

- g) **LEADER:** Steps are now being taken by the Scottish Government's LEADER Delivery Team to recover uncommitted resources from Local Action Groups (LAGs), beginning with funds earmarked for co-operation projects. Cairngorms LEADER has exceeded minimum levels of co-operation project support. The Cairngorms LAG is likely to bid for additional funding to support a co-operation project under development with Highland Council. The Cairngorms LAG also continues to consider "shovel ready" pipeline projects developed by community groups and is working with community networks to identify other projects, should additional funding become available to finance community led projects. The LAG has also entered a partnership with Kilkenny LAG in Ireland to consider sustainable rural transport initiatives and, through the Cairngorms Trust, intends to develop a stakeholder group to design and manage a sustainable rural transport project over the coming 18 months. Further information on LEADER, in driving community led local development in the Cairngorms, is set out in a separate update paper to this Board meeting.

Grant Moir

June 2019

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Board Convener Report – For Information

Since my last update, we have welcomed Deirdre Falconer and John Kirk to the Board following their election in wards 1 and 3 respectively. We have also welcomed back Willie McKenna, Eleanor Mackintosh and Geva Blackett following their re-election to wards 2, 4 and 5. This will now bring a period of stability to the Board for the next three and a half years.

Janet Hunter and I attended the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter Network Conference. The Cairngorm National Park was asked to present a case study on our work on planning sustainable visitor numbers and the unique challenges we face in the Cairngorms. Janet did a great job leading the presentation and it created considerable debate. I led the Q&A session afterwards which ran on beyond our time due to the level of interest there was in the way we approach not only tourism, but our partnership approach to working. As well as being able to showcase the Cairngorms, the conference also allowed us the opportunity to hear about different approaches being taken elsewhere to managing significant tourist pressures or to attracting more in a sustainable way. It also allowed us the opportunity to discuss European level environment policy with colleagues from across Europe.

I have continued to engage with young people in the Park, and since my last report have addressed students from the University of the Highlands and Islands at their Land Use Conference in Carrbridge. I also met the Cairngorms Youth Steering Group at Glenmore and discussed with them different ways the Board could engage with the group going forward. This will come forward as a paper at a future meeting.

Grant Moir and I met with representatives of the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS) to discuss potential projects and our future working relationship. This was a positive meeting and some follow-up actions have been taken away by both parties. Geva Blackett and I met with Angus McNicol, Chair of the Cairngorm Business Partnership, to discuss how the Park and the CBP can work closer together going forward on economic development matters.

Last week I attended the Strengthening Communities Conference along with Willie Munro and staff from our Rural Development and LEADER teams. As part of the conference the CNPA hosted two fringe events, one on the issues for young people in rural communities and one on key rural issues including affordable housing, broadband and community ownership of land. We had thirty young people along from the Cairngorm Youth Steering Group who led the workshop session and set out a number of the key issues in the EUROPARC Youth Manifesto. Both workshops led to productive discussions about positive action that could be taken both here in the Cairngorms and further afield to address some of these issues. I'm grateful to Willie McKenna and Derek Ross for coming along and helping support the discussions at our fringe events, and we were pleased to have community representatives from across the Park attend our rural issues fringe as well.

Xander McDade
Board Convener

External Engagements (20th March – 28th May 2019)

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
20/3	Visit Aberdeenshire Tourism Conference	Aberdeen
20/3	UHI Land Use Talk	Carrbridge
21/3	Highland Community Planning Partnership	Inverness
21/3	CNPA Direct Election Count	Aviemore
26/3	CNPA/CBP meeting	Grantown-on-Spey
3/4	CNPA Staff Away Day	Glenmore
8-15/4	EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter Network Conference	Tzoumerka, Acheloos, Agrafa and Meteora National Park
25/4	Sustainable House Renovations in Cairngorms	Boat of Garten
7/5	OATS meeting	Grantown-on-Spey
10/5	Big Weekend – Cairngorms Connect Event	Boat of Garten
15/5	CNPA Community Engagement Evening	Aviemore
17/5	CNPA/CBP Chairs Meeting	Ballater
26/5	Cairngorm Youth Steering Group	Glenmore
27-28/5	Strengthening Communities Conference	Aviemore