

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3

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Purpose

To inform the Board of our work in delivering the third strategic theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08, and our plans for future activity in the context of the new Corporate Plan.

Recommendations

- That the Board note the work that has been delivered in respect of the third theme of the Corporate Plan for 2005-08 and ongoing associated work

Executive Summary

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

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”

At the end of the 2005-2008 Corporate Plan period, it is evident that there has been good progress in respect of this theme. The direction that has been established and many of the activities and projects that have been delivered have helped shape our thinking going forward. This has provided a firm foundation for much of the work set out within the Park Plan priorities for action and the new Corporate Plan for 2008-2011

CORPORATE PLAN REPORT: THEME 3 – FOR INFORMATION

Background

1. This is the sixth and final report on the third theme of the CNPA's Corporate Plan for 2005-08. The Board considered the previous reports in May and November 2005, in June and November 2006 and in October 2007.
2. The third theme is:

“To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”
3. Given this focus, our work on economic and social development issues has focused on areas that are directly linked to the special qualities. Furthermore, economic and social activity that also contributed to the achievement of the other Corporate Plan themes was prioritised.
4. Delivery of the third Corporate Plan theme has primarily been the responsibility of the CNPA's Economic and Social Development (ESD) and Planning and Development Control (PDC) Groups, although other groups have also made important contributions. For example, work on access, interpretation, land management etc, also provides important economic and social benefits. This report, however, focuses only upon the work of the ESD and PDC Groups and has been structured around key policy areas. It does not seek to cover all of the work that is being or has been undertaken in these areas but rather draws out some of the key elements.

Housing

5. Our work on housing is set within the context of the Park Plan priority for action on 'Making Housing More Affordable and Sustainable', the delivery of which is being co-ordinated by a Delivery Team of key partners. It is worth noting that the strategic and operational context for housing delivery is in a state of transition at the moment. The Scottish Government is considering its strategic approach to housing issues and has issued a consultation document, 'Firm Foundations' (the executive summary of which was circulated to the Board for information). Taking account of input from Board members a consultation response has been submitted by the Authority. In addition, Communities Scotland is to be wound up at the end of March with some of its functions being transferred to Local Authorities and others being absorbed into the Scottish Government.
6. There are several Park Plan related initiatives that have been progressed or supported by the Park Authority. These include:
 - a) Along with Highland Council, Communities Scotland and the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust, we co-funded the feasibility study and design

competition for the development of affordable housing on Forestry Commission land at Kincaig. The site has been procured and detailed planning permission for four houses was recently granted by the Park Authority. The houses have been allocated to local people and costs are being negotiated down to a level that will make them affordable with Rural Home Ownership Grant support;

- b) In order to gain a clear picture of the barriers to landowners providing affordable housing and to assess the potential for improving existing stock, converting derelict/redundant buildings or providing new build, we jointly funded a survey of landowners which has been undertaken by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA). More detailed surveys and valuations have been conducted for a number of these properties (and others that were subsequently identified). Grant offers were made by Communities Scotland in respect of 10 projects with the potential to support up to 27 properties but, to date, it appears that the offers are only likely to be accepted in respect of two of the properties;
- c) Work is concluding on the pilot community needs engagement project in the Grantown on Spey, Cromdale, Advie and Dulnain Bridge area. Consultants, Housing Plus, have worked with the communities and partner organisations from the Badenoch and Strathspey (community planning) Partnership to identify and prioritise economic, social and environmental actions as well as gathering more detailed local housing needs data. The housing information will prove valuable in helping to inform housing development requirements in the area.
- d) The Rural Housing Enabler project in Aberdeenshire is entering its third and final year. We have part funded the project and are a member of its steering group. Other partners include Aberdeenshire Council, Registered Social Landlords, the SRPBA and the Rural Housing Service. In essence the role of the Housing Enabler post is to work with local communities to help them progress affordable housing solutions. Within the Park, the main focus has been on working with the Braemar community. Part of this work has involved a local housing needs survey being undertaken to help provide supporting evidence for appropriate affordable housing developments.
- e) Work has been proceeding on the Sustainable Design Guide/Sustainability Checklist and it is envisaged that a draft will be brought forward for agreement for consultation late summer/autumn. Partner agencies/authorities, communities and developers will all have input to this document as it has to be practical and capable of delivering development that is affordable whilst incorporating high standards of design and sustainability.

Sustainable Tourism

- 7. Our tourism work is driven by the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, which was the underpinning basis for the Park achieving the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This, in turn, has fed through into the Park Plan with relevant actions being picked up under several priorities for action, the main ones being 'Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable' and 'Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park'.

8. Engagement with businesses is also critical for success and good progress has been made with over 130 approvals made for use of the National Park Brand. Following the Board's decision on the use of family brands, all existing family brand users are finalising new designs incorporating the words 'National Park'. An additional family brand approval has been made to a group of independent hostels around the Park who have started to promote themselves collectively and are investigating other opportunities to work together. The 'Cairngorms Hostels in the National Park' brand is shown at Annex 1.
9. The Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce has also been given permission to use a family brand. They have committed to working with all of their members over the coming year to make sure they individually meet the Brand criteria. This is an extremely positive step and offers great potential to improve quality and environmental standards across the business community and, of course, to greatly boost brand uptake.
10. The Authority is continuing to support the two Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) – Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO and Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms DMO. Support has also been provided to the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Highland Holidays tourism marketing group. These bodies provide the best way of communicating and working with tourism businesses on sustainable tourism projects and play a key role in delivering elements of the Park Plan. Examples of work that has been undertaken or is being planned include:
 - a) the 'Business Barometer' survey which examined business confidence and investment plans (Aviemore & the Cairngorms DMO);
 - b) Hospitality skills training (Royal Deeside & the Cairngorms DMO);
 - c) a Park-wide customer feedback initiative.
11. Presentations to the Board on the work of the DMOs are being scheduled for April with a subsequent Board paper covering future support for the DMOs planned for May.
12. Work has also been progressing on the development of a Cairngorms National Park web portal. Aimed at visitors, the portal will help deliver on a range of Park Plan outcomes. It is being developed in partnership with the DMOs and the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce and it is expected that the first phase of the website will be launched by the end of March.
13. The annual Cairngorms National Park tourism conference was held in Boat of Garten on 7 November. Attended by around 130 people, the day was themed around promoting local produce and encouraging local purchasing and supply. Feedback from the delegates was that it had been an excellent event.
14. A re-assessment for Charter Park status is due in 2010. A mid-term review is being planned for the coming year to assess progress against the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. The review will be conducted by an external assessor and

will flag up any areas where additional action may be required in order to demonstrate clear progress in order to safeguard Charter Park status. An update paper will be brought to the Board after the review has been undertaken.

Transport

15. The Cairngorms Explorer public transport map and timetable is to be produced again this year. It will feature 'Cairngorms on a Shoestring' - information on opportunities to explore and enjoy the Park at no or low cost.
16. The cross-Park Heather Hopper 501 bus service has again been funded by the Authority in partnership with the Highland Council and Aberdeenshire Council. It will run from 12 May to 28 September. This year it will link Newtonmore – Grantown – Ballater. One of the buses will be fully accessible to disabled people while the other will be able to carry bicycles. Again, a non-subsidised 502 service will link to this. The 502 service will run from Aberdeen-Ballater-Pitlochry.
17. The Authority is a partner in a successful Northern Periphery Programme application. One initiative that is to be progressed within this is the trial of a community based electric car in the Park.

Strengthening Communities

18. The Cairngorms LEADER+ Programme is in the process of being closed down. It is anticipated that by the time of the Board meeting, the Cairngorms Local Action Group (LAG) will have been informed of their budget allocation under the new LEADER programme and they will be in a position to start making grant approvals. The LAG is currently considering ways in which it might play a more pro-active role in stimulating specific priority projects.
19. It is important to note that there will be greater scope to support land based projects under the new programme and, in view of this, land management interests are now represented on the LAG. The appointment of the Land Management Support Officers being progressed by the Heritage and Land Management Group will help in ensuring that applicants are guided down the most appropriate SRDP funding route – be that LEADER or Rural Development Contracts.
20. Work is continuing to strengthen linkages with community planning processes and partnerships with a view to developing a more integrated approach to community based issues. The LAG has ensured cross-membership with community planning partnerships and funding links are also being developed. We are working with the community planning partnerships to progress more community action planning along the lines of the pilot referred to in the housing section of this paper. Following an approach from the Tomintoul and Glenlivet communities it is likely that that will be the next area for this work to take place.

21. We have recently helped fund the Association of Cairngorms Communities to engage external consultants in order to review their operation and develop a forward plan. This work is due to be completed in mid-March after which the Authority will be in a position to consider whether there is a case for continuing to provide grant support.

Learning and Inclusion

22. The "Park for All" Conference in November focused on the theme of transport issues for young people, people with disabilities and those living on low income. Feedback on the conference was extremely positive from those attending. The main outcomes included:
 - a) Commitment to replicate "good practice community transport projects" in other areas of the Park (and more widely);
 - b) Opportunities for community transport projects and agencies to network and look at creative ways of working together;
 - c) Raised awareness about barriers for certain groups of people accessing community and public transport.
23. It should also be noted that the conference was planned to be as accessible as possible, with particular attention being placed on meeting any special support requirements for people attending the event. The Highlands and Islands Equalities Forum have since adopted this template in hosting their events.
24. The Joint National Park/SNH Outreach project is progressing well. Desktop research has been completed and now it is focusing on supporting visits to the Parks by excluded groups and reporting on their experiences. Another strand of the work is looking at identifying the practical problems faced by schools in using the Parks as an educational resource. The findings, including recommendations on how to most effectively to develop a sustainable outreach programme for the Parks, will be launched in early 2009. It is worth noting that National Park Authorities in England and Wales are taking an interest in this work and have requested a presentation at the ANPA Members Conference that this year focuses on Education and Interpretation.
25. Our Education and Inclusion Manager, Claire Ross, has also been putting a great deal of effort into finalising an education website for the Park. This has been a joint initiative with SNH and the site, known as the 'Cairngorms Learning Zone', will shortly be going live. The website is aimed at Higher and Higher Still students and covers a wide range of topics such as: landscape and geology, ecosystems and biodiversity, people and land use.
26. In relation to work with young people, two youth events were held on 8 November 2007 in Aviemore and 9 November 2007 in Ballater. The aim of these events was to:
 - a) Raise awareness of the National Park and highlight the opportunities available to young people (both CNPA led and external projects);

- b) Share experiences and discuss common issues for young people that are related to the Park Plan and explore ways of addressing and supporting them, including funding;
 - c) Provide a forum for young people to meet others in a fun and interactive way;
27. Pupils from all seven secondary schools in and on the edge of the Park attended the day sessions, whilst the evening session was aimed at young workers too so attracted a wider mix of age groups from 12 years to 18 years plus. In total over 300 young people took part in the events.
28. Overall, the events were well received and the aims were achieved. An evaluation of the events, including lessons for repeating and improving such events, has previously been circulated to Board members.
29. On the skills and training front. The CNPA is currently involved with the development and piloting of an SVQ 2 in rural skills. LANTRA are taking the lead on this project with the qualification initially being rolled out in the National Park area. The SVQ will cover primary areas such as forestry, agriculture, estate management and environmental conservation.
30. The Land Based Business Training project and the new Cairngorms Awareness and Pride (CAP) "public benefits" training programme, for people living and working within the Park area, have continued to be well received. Partnership funding is being firmed up for the next financial year.

Development Management

31. We have been collating statistics in half years to correspond with the Scottish Government returns that we are obliged to submit. For the purposes of this report we are therefore comparing figures in the half year ending 30 September 2007 with the quarter ending 31 December 2007. In the quarter ending 31 December 2007, the "call-in" rate increased from 13% in the half year ending 30 September 2007 up to almost 18%. At that point the number of applications in hand had increased from 64 in the previous half year to 70 at the end of the quarter. There were 29 determinations in the previous half year and 12 in the quarter to 31 December 2007. Since then, there have been several further determinations and a relatively modest call in level, bringing the number of active applications as at 22 February "call-in" meeting to a total of 41. At the time of writing 7 applications are going forward for determination on 7 March 2008. The numbers of applications determined in less than 3 months and in 3 – 4 months have increased between the two periods corresponding with the current Determination Committee format. The trend is going in the right direction and efforts are being made to work with applicants and consultees to further improve the standard of service that is provided."

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ANNEX 1 – CAIRNGORMS HOSTELS FAMILY BRAND

