

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

BRIEFING PAPER

Title: **Briefing on National Park Plan Priority for Action: 5
(Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable)**

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Purpose:

To inform the Board on progress made in delivering the National Park Plan Priority for Action 5, Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable.

Recommendations

That the Board note the progress made in delivering this Priority for Action.

Executive Summary

This paper is one of a series of background briefing papers to inform the Board, and in particular new members, of the work of CNPA. This paper covers the National Park Plan Priority for Action 5, Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable.

This paper explains why and how we are working with the business community and what we are seeking to achieve. The role of the National Park Authority is outlined and specific examples of partnership working are described. An update of progress against the associated outcomes is provided in Annex 1 and a detailed summary of collective work against all actions is shown in Annex 2. The Cairngorms Business Partnership will also provide a short presentation to help illustrate one of the key collaborative projects; a supporting brief on the CBP is at Annex 3.

MAKING TOURISM AND BUSINESS MORE SUSTAINABLE BRIEFING PAPER

Rationale and Policy Context

1. The rationale for this being a priority is articulated in the current Park Plan thus:
 - a) *The long-term sustainability of the National Park requires a diverse and vibrant economy, an economy that is based on, and actively works to conserve and enhance, the special qualities of this area and one that involves and benefits local communities.*
 - b) *In addition to tourism there is a wide range of other business opportunities, linked to the special qualities of the area such as building design, food and drink, land management and small-scale renewable energy. There is a need to encourage and support a range of interested parties to make the most of these opportunities.*
2. The 2010 Economic and Social Health of the Park report estimates the economic wealth of the Park's economy at approximately £400 million. Tourism plays a key role and influences many different sectors but the structure of the Cairngorms economy is unique, with a distinctive mix of industries including other important sectors of whisky production, forestry, agriculture and sporting estate management. Home ownership and construction, services, public sector and manufacturing also play a significant part.
3. Many businesses in the Park are small and the number of self-employed are higher than the average. The number of workplaces and employees has increased since designation, the latter by approximately 1000 to a current total of just under 9,000. The Park is seen as an attractive place to live and work, reflected by a growing population base, older than the Scottish average, but balanced in some ways by a trend for young adults to return to the area at an earlier age.
4. Thriving and sustainable communities need thriving and sustainable economic activity; not just to create wealth and provide jobs but also to help manage, conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and culture that makes up the fabric of our communities. Economic success will help drive community prosperity and will also impact on natural and cultural heritage. Whilst CNPA may not have a core role to play in terms of economic development it is an area that we must remain engaged with if we are to realise the long-term Outcomes and Vision in the Park Plan. As with many other areas of CNPA work there is a real challenge in developing a consistent approach to economic issues as the public sector landscape across the Park is particularly fragmented.

Partnership Working

5. The broad ethos of enabling activity of others in the Park to collectively achieve the vision in the Park Plan has been covered in detail in previous briefings and in particular with the closely linked Priority for Action, Awareness and Understanding¹. Many of the same challenges apply to this programme but there are several subtle differences that are worth highlighting. It is also worth noting that these same

¹ CNPA Board Briefing Paper 29 October 2010.

challenges also offer opportunity: opportunity for more efficient delivery of advice and assistance, opportunity for developing innovative projects and initiatives and opportunity for doing business differently.

Public Sector

6. Public sector boundaries and differing approaches and priorities exacerbate the difficulty in achieving real consensus on economic issues in the Park. In addition to the 5 local authorities the Park is also split between the national economic development agencies, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and within the Visit Scotland structure. There is no clear economic strategy for the Park to help engage partners; instead our economic 'aims and vision' are contained within the wider National Park Plan. Also, the potential of the Park, particularly as a destination, is not recognised and portrayed as strongly as it could be by some of our key partners. This cluttered landscape makes it challenging for the public sector to engage with the business community across the Park, and vice versa.

Private Sector

7. Great strides have been made to simplify and improve our engagement with the business community at large but challenges and sensitivities do remain. The public sector approach outlined above creates suspicion, frustration and confusion. Equally the private sector is not a homogeneous or united grouping, as businesses are, for good reasons, structured around different geographical or sectoral structures.

Engagement

8. The main formal ways in which we work with our partners has been through the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum (formerly the Visitor Services, Information and Tourism Forum) and the Delivery Team for Tourism, Business, Awareness and Understanding. These groupings bring together key partners to collectively advise on and deliver this area of the National Park Plan. Communities and local business groupings are represented, albeit to varying degrees.

Collective Delivery

9. **Annex 1** (extracted from the Park Plan monitoring paper) provides an assessment on progress towards the outcomes. **Annex 2** lists activities that have been delivered, many with partners, and illustrates the variety of work undertaken over the years. Many of the detailed actions were developed directly from the 2005 Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action Plan. However, in order to more fully explain our role it is worth looking in more detail at some specific examples.

Cairngorms Business Partnership

10. The development of the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) is the most significant activity within this programme. **Annex 3**² provides further detail and will be complemented by a short presentation from CBP staff. Although still in early stages the CBP is showing real promise and, given time, has the potential to address some of the key challenges noted above and help realise the full economic potential of the Park. The CNPA has played a key role in supporting this innovative partnership initiative.

² A board discussion paper on the CBP already circulated for a previous CNPA Board meeting postponed twice because of snow in late 2010.

Cairngorms National Park Brand

11. The brand has been a significant success and was covered in detail in the Awareness and Understanding update but has equal relevance from a wider economic and tourism perspective. Importantly the brand is for the Park and not the Park Authority, so communities and businesses in the Park have a stake in it. It is one of the most powerful tools we have for engaging those who live and work in the Park with the benefits and values of the National Park. Of note, the marketing work being developed by the CBP has the current brand central to their current proposition and should see a step change in brand usage and awareness once implemented.

Food for Life

12. Food and drink is one area yet to be fully developed in the Park. The 2010 Food for Life Development plan sought to address this and has received Board approval and significant LEADER funding for its delivery over the next 3 years. Work with food and drink closely matches national priorities and public interest and has influence not just on the economic sector (primary production, processing, retail and tourism) but also land management, health, education and communities. Although there was significant local and regional enthusiasm for doing more around food and drink it required CNPA to harness this enthusiasm and help develop a suitable plan.

Looking Forwards – Opportunities and Challenges

13. Progress against the outcomes in Annex 2 and the positive picture emerging from recent research suggest that the economy is in relatively good heart. However, there is little room for complacency in the current economic climate and we need to continue to strengthen the diversity and resilience of our local economy.
14. We need to be clear with our broad policy towards population growth, and therefore employment and economic opportunity, and the next Park Plan provides a mechanism to explore this in more detail. There are significant implications for infrastructure such as transport and broadband (home and dispersed working offers opportunity for individuals and businesses), land provision for economic use and housing and, education and skills development.
15. Declining public sector budgets will require us to focus future activity in areas that are likely to have the most impact and partnership working is more important than ever but we need to find better ways of interacting with key partners in relation to economic issues. Recent national initiatives, such as the Scottish Government's 2009 National Food Policy and the 2010 Low Carbon Economic Strategy offer opportunity to develop actions using the National Park as a regional pilot or area for innovation. The next Park Plan is attracting some interest but many still see the Park as being of little relevance. What do we need to do to raise appreciation of the economic value of National Parks and how should we best define our role in economic development alongside the enterprise networks, Visit Scotland, and the private sector?

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