
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT

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) **Catchment Partnerships** – The Spey catchment initiative is reviewing its catchment management plan, starting with a seminar on 20th June. This is well timed to link with the partnership plan consultation in relation to flood management in particular, and more broadly is an opportunity to help address the big issues affecting the river including freshwater pearl mussel, abstraction and flow levels, and river restoration opportunities. In the Dee catchment, the Pearls in Peril project has been extended to enable completion of the work underway.
- b) **Woodland expansion** – The Cairngorms Nature seminar on 28th June focuses on future plans for delivering woodland expansion and enhancement. There continue to be new planting proposals coming through including good examples combining conservation value with timber production. We plan to update the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework following the Partnership Plan consultation, as this will now replace the local authority forest strategies which will no longer cover the National Park area as they are reviewed over the next year.
- c) **Peatland restoration** – Despite the loss of Peatland Action project funding we are retaining Stephen Corcoran’s role focused primarily on supporting peatland restoration. There remains significant interest from land managers and we are scoping potential projects and working with the IUCN team to explore other funding options. We have also submitted an initial proposal to be part of a UK wide LIFE funding programme.
- d) **Deer** – we continue to support discussions across the boundaries of the existing Deer Management Groups to reconcile different objectives. The new Deer Management Plans are due to be completed over the next month, and this process has raised the question again of potential boundary changes to make more functional Deer Management Group units. We intend to discuss this issue alongside the Partnership Plan consultation at the next CDAG meeting in September.

- e) **Designated sites** – SNH hosted a stakeholder discussion in May on how we make the most of designated sites in delivering the Partnership Plan. Currently 81% of features in the Park are in favourable condition, with over grazing, disturbance and burning being the three most significant negative pressures. This began a discussion with partners that we will develop through the partnership plan consultation on how we can better integrate site specific delivery of favourable condition with the wider conservation strategy for habitat restoration and enhancement.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership** - Following the consultation partners met with local businesses, residents and NGO's before finalising the consultation report. The next stage is a discussion with CNPA Board in June followed by redrafting the strategy to go to September meeting of CNPA Board.
- b) **The Mountains and People Project** - Work is progressing on upgrading both Lochnagar plateau path and Dubh Loch path in Aberdeenshire. Jock's Road and Glittering Skellies paths are the priorities this year in Angus. Further recruitment activity has been undertaken in both parks with 14 trainee roles recruited during this period in two separate drives. With over 200 applications for the roles the level of interest was as high as the calibre of applications. The Lomond training course started in early April and the Cairngorms course will start mid-June. The 2017 courses and beyond will run concurrently from April to October.
- c) **Speyside Way** - The next stage of Speyside Way Extension taking the route to Argeal is now complete. A funding application has been made to SRDP for the section to Insh, and planning permission will be submitted this summer. Construction of this section is unlikely before spring 2017 pushing back the potential competition to Kingussie to 2018.
- d) **Deeside Way** - We are preparing a bid to Scottish Enterprise for funds to take Phase One of Deeside Way Extension (Braemar to Invercauld Bridge) to a 'shovel ready' stage with planning consent and design and construction methods in place.
- e) **Active Cairngorms** - The first of the three GP referral schemes has started health walks in Tomintoul, with Ballater and Aviemore scheduled to start later in June.
- f) **Wee Walks Week** - Plans are being developed for Cairngorms 'Wee Walks Week' - a park wide event to encourage groups and individuals across the Cairngorms to take part in a least one short walk during the week 5th – 11th September. We will target existing health walk groups, schools and youth groups, parent and toddlers, ramblers and disabled ramblers as well as some employers, but anyone will be able to make an on-line 'pledge' and commit to at least one walk during the week.
- g) **Volunteering** - An application was submitted to Leader in April for three years funding to cover the costs of a volunteer support programme. We have already identified salary for a part time volunteer ranger co-ordinator and if successful the Leader grant will allow us to fund the costs of recruiting and supporting volunteers.

- h) **Youth and Learning** - Forty pupils from S1 class at Grantown Grammar School recently completed a pilot education programme called 'Planning in the Park'. This practical course was designed by staff from Visitor Experience, Planning and GGS Geography Dept. to give secondary pupils an insight in the planning process and to produce local development plans for both Grantown and their own community. The team are currently reviewing the course before deciding whether it can be offered to other secondary schools in and around the National Park.
- i) **Junior Rangers** - Thirty three young people from Strathspey High, Kingussie High and Grantown Grammar have completed a five day Junior Ranger programme. Two more courses are planned for this summer from Aboyne Academy and Pitlochry High. Four Junior Rangers from the Cairngorms have been selected to attend the Europarc Junior Range Camp in Latvia.
- j) **Visitor Infrastructure** - CNPA are supporting the Aberdeenshire Council team redeveloping Ballater Station. The new Craigellachie National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre will be formally opened at the end of June. Located in the Aviemore Youth Hostel the development was led by Scottish Natural Heritage in partnership with SYHA and CNPA.
- k) **Snowroads Scenic Route** - Work is scheduled to start on the two Scenic Routes sites at Tomintoul and Glen Shee in late June. Cairngorms Business Partnership has applied to Scottish Enterprise for a Destination Development grant to work with local businesses and tourism groups to develop the route. The application has made it past stage one with a stage two bid submitted in June.

Rural Development:

- a) **Development Management** – At the March Planning Committee we are due to consider applications for Kingussie housing site and deferred Nethy Bridge horse livery (following a site visit). Housing application at Beachen Court, Grantown has been called in and application for former Tesco site and Travel Lodge, both in Aviemore, are awaited. Application for Ballater Station (Visitor Info. Centre, Heritage Centre and Restaurant) expected in May 2016.
- b) **Planning Review** – The Independent Planning Review has submitted its report to Scottish Government. There are a number of recommendations that we support and the report also recommends that the scope of powers of the Cairngorms National Park Authority is reviewed. This is what we asked for in our submission and we welcome the opportunity to look at the system in the Cairngorms.
- c) **VisitAberdeenshire** - Staff from the newly established 'VisitAberdeenshire' (VA) will take part in a 'fam' trip this month to discover and learn more about the Cairngorms National Park and to meet local businesses. CNPA staff have developed the itinerary in conjunction with the team at the Cairngorms Business Partnership. The 'Make it Yours' programme is also being rolled out more widely with visitor facing staff across the National Park and materials are being developed to support this.
- d) **Community Broadband Scotland** - We continue to support Community Broadband Scotland to develop an aggregation scheme for the National Park. A Community Company will be formed to lead the development and delivery of the project linked to the Cairngorms Trust and supported by CNPA.

- e) **Building Stronger Communities** - A pilot project is being developed with four communities in the National Park to help communities and partners better measure and understand what capacity they have and what support is available to them. If successful, the project could be rolled out more widely.
- f) The Cairngorms National Park was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas by the Europarc Federation in 2005 and again in 2011. We are looking at re-applying to Europarc for accreditation and our preferred is to use the new NPPP to provide the strategic context for delivering sustainable tourism in the CNP with an updated Tourism Action. This has been discussed at the CTP.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) There have been a series of meetings held with stakeholders including JMT, RZSS, HH, UHI, SLE, RSPB, SE LINK, CBP, GWCT & individual estates.
- b) The Convenor has met with Edward Mountain MSP and has written to all the other MSP's for the Park offering to meet at the appropriate time. The Convenor has also written to the new Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham MSP congratulating her on the appointment and seeking a meeting in due course.
- c) The CEO has also attended the NDPB CEO Forum, Scottish Leaders Forum, UKNP, RAFF Delivery Board.

Communications:

- a) **National Park Partnership Plan Consultation** - The NPPP Consultation will be launched on Monday 27th June and run until 30th September (14 weeks). The consultation document including the Big 9 Issue sheets, infographics on the 3 main themes Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development and a response form will be available on our website and various locations around the Park. Large print and black & white versions are available on request. All our partners and key stakeholders have been involved and informed about the consultation process in advance of the launch and a media plan is in place to promote the Big 9 issues throughout the consultation period. A Holyrood Magazine article on the consultation in the context of the theme 'Scotland's Place in the World' will appear w/c 20th June in time for the Royal Highland Show and will be distributed to all MSPs, MPs and their researchers. An engagement programme of events is also in place and was circulated to Board members on 7th June.
- b) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign** - At this year's Cairngorms Nature Festival there were over 80 events across the Park with 1098 attendees a 29% increase over last year. 90% said it was excellent or very good, 87% said it exceeded their expectations and 97% would recommend it to others. The Cairngorms Nature Young Presenter Competition will run again this year and was launched in June. A joint UK-wide competition with RSPB and Speyside Wildlife, it is aimed at 10-16 year olds who are asked to produce a 90 second nature video. Cairngorms Nature Facebook has 6250 followers and Cairngorms Nature Twitter has over 1300 followers.

- c) **Active Cairngorms** - The Rural Affairs, Food & Environment (RAFE) communications group are working on a joint campaign led by SNH to promote Scotland's Natural Health Service which will include promotion of Active Cairngorms. This will also be the theme at the joint RAFE stand at the Royal Highland Show (23-26 June) and many of the CNPA staff in attendance will be from the Access Team. Active Twitter now has 1045 followers and Active Facebook 347.
- d) **Make It Yours** - An engagement programme focussed on major visitor facing organisations has resulted in a presentation with support pack being presented to 10 organisations and over 100 staff. Feedback so far has been positive and support materials are available via the CNP website. We have 121 Brand Charter holders and the MIY e-bulletin goes out to 135 subscribers. A pilot using a 'tear –off' map of the Park to use with visitors will be sent to VICs, Ranger bases and major visitor attractions and accommodation providers over the summer to determine whether this will help promote the Park and the key attractions and activities it has to offer.
- e) **Corporate Communications** - Work has started on producing our next Annual Review & Accounts which will be ready for submission to Ministers over the summer. Following the recent Scottish Parliament elections we have 15 new MSPs with responsibility for the CNP. An engagement programme is being prepared for the autumn and we will carry out another MSP opinion survey in December. A Gaelic Language Plan progress report will be prepared in July and submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig and an application for support funding from the GLAIF has been made – we are waiting to hear if this has been successful.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project** We expect Seafeld Estate as the developer to be issuing tender documents over the summer period with a view to undertaking any cost-engineering and securing a contractor by the end of September and construction happening thereafter. Demolition of the boardroom is being dealt with as a separate contract and may happen by end August or early September.
- b) **2015/16 Accounts** - The external audit exercise is well progressed and the Audit and Risk Committee should be in a position to consider final accounts documents and external audit reports at its meeting on 1 July 2016.
- c) **Organisational Development Strategy** - Following on from a very successful staff away day, and building on the most recent staff survey results, we are in the process of developing the second phase of our Organisational Development Strategy which will come to a future meeting of the Staffing and Recruitment Committee.
- d) Staff recruited in the last quarter includes Emma Butler (Landscape Adviser) joining us on 1st July, and Mark Tucker (Trainee Accounts, Payroll and Finance Officer) joining us in September.

Upcoming Issues of Note:

- a) The launch of the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan on 27 June 2016.

Grant Moir

February 2016

Board Member Update – Paul Easto

Myself and Grant met with Steve Harris, CEO of the recently formed VisitAberdeenshire destination organisation. The purpose of the meeting was to explore how CNPA and VisitAberdeenshire could collaborate to develop and promote tourism within the Park. It was a timely meeting since the new organisation is very much in the early stage of development. It was agreed that there were four key areas to partner on: i) Joint Marketing ii) Visitor Information iii) Scenic Route Development (see further comments below) and iv) Deeside Way Extension. VisitAberdeenshire has agreed to future participation in the CTP and, as a reciprocal step, Steve Harris has suggested that a representative of the CNPA is co-opted as an observer to the Board of VisitAberdeenshire. This is clearly advantageous in helping to develop the relationship and identify opportunities for collaboration. A good indicator of early progress is the decision by Steve Harris and Mark Tate (from the CBP) to make a joint presentation to the CBP Summer Conference on future marketing plans for the Park.

At a meeting of the CTP on 25 May, the group were brought up to date by the Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA) on the mid-term review of the Tourism Strategy 2020. The four key priority areas for Scottish tourism coming out of the mid-term review were:

1. Digital - connectivity, online presence and content
2. Leadership - developing skills and talent across the industry
3. Influencing Investment - in those areas key to the visitor journey
4. Quality of the Visitor Experience - improvements and adaptation to new customer requirements

Reflecting upon the review, the challenge for the CTP is to interpret what this means for the Park area. Are these the correct priorities? If so, what should be the focus for action? Most importantly of all, how does this integrate with the new NPPP? Over the next few months, I will be working with Grant, Murray and the team to develop our thinking and evolve the Tourism Action Plan for the Park consistent with the scope and direction of the NPPP. We will report back to the board in due course.

The decision to renew the Park's status under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas was also discussed. It was agreed that the CNPA should apply to renew. While the Charter has limited value from a consumer perspective, it does represent an opportunity for the Park's performance as an international sustainable tourism destination to be independently assessed and accredited. The framework provided by the Charter serves, in itself, as a useful tool for the development, evaluation and monitoring of tourism activity within the Park.

The final development to note is progress of the Scottish Scenic Routes Initiative. Led by the CBP, a bid is underway to secure support from Scottish Enterprise for the development and marketing of a Park wide tourist route. Initial feedback on the project proposal is encouraging and this will be progressed by the CBP and CNPA in the coming weeks."

Board Member Update - Angela Douglas

Historic Environment Scotland's stakeholder reception at the New Drumossie Hotel on Monday 18 April 2016.

- They are very keen to collaborate
- They wish to hear the views of others as to how best they progress especially regarding their new corporate plan that is due to be released soon.