
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CAIRNGORMS TOURISM ACTION PLAN: ANNUAL UPDATE

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Purpose

To review annual progress with delivery of the Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan and look forwards to priorities in the year ahead.

Recommendation

That the Board:

- a) **Note progress with the current programme of work by partners which is delivering both the Tourism Action Plan and key actions in Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017 – 2022.**

Summary

This paper summarises the strategic programme of work on tourism that is ongoing by a range of partners to deliver the Tourism Action Plan and the National Park Partnership Plan as a contribution to delivery of the national strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020. Based on our collective achievements to date, and this planned programme of work, the Cairngorms National Park was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas in late 2017. The Park is the only destination in Scotland to hold this award, and one of only three such destinations in the UK.

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Strategic Context

1. In 2005 the Cairngorms National Park became the first National Park in the UK to be awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In 2011 and 2017, when our progress reports and new strategies were evaluated, the Charter was re-awarded – the Park is the only destination in Scotland to hold this award, and one of only three such destinations in the UK.
2. The European Charter is a practical management tool that enables protected areas to develop tourism sustainably, based on five Principles:
 - a) Giving priority to protection
 - b) Contributing to sustainable development
 - c) Engaging all stakeholders
 - d) Planning sustainable tourism effectively
 - e) Pursuing continuous improvement
3. Scotland's national tourism strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020 was launched in June 2012, with an ambition to grow visitor spend by £1bn to 2020, and reviewed in 2016 with renewed emphasis on the four priorities below. The Strategy is currently under review:
 - a) Strengthen Digital Capabilities
 - b) Strengthen Industry Leadership
 - c) Enhance the Quality of the Visitor Experience
 - d) Influence Investment, specifically flight access & transport connectivity, built infrastructure, digital connectivity and business growth finance
4. The 2017-22 National Park Partnership Plan includes the following actions, distributed across several priorities:
 - a) Developing new ways, including visitor-giving, to fund infrastructure investment and maintaining and upgrading key off-road routes including Speyside Way, Deeside Way and the Core Paths network;
 - b) Delivering a consistent high quality of visitor welcome through new and improved information, support for ranger services and partnership working to support businesses, communities and visitor attractions;
 - c) Improving the visitor infrastructure in Cairngorm and Glenmore, and Tomintoul and Glenlivet;
 - d) Completing the 'Snow Roads Scenic Route' and developing a similar experience along the A9;

- e) Encouraging the provision of low cost camping and motor-home sites in appropriate locations;
- f) Improving visitor transport options and information;
- g) Better co-ordination and promotion of public transport and active travel;
- h) Improving opportunities for active travel in Aviemore that deliver improved transport connections for visitors and residents; and
- i) Establishing a new spatial priority area to provide an enhanced level of future assistance/collaboration over a focused time period to the Dalwhinnie, Kingussie, Laggan and Newtonmore area from 2019/20, making the most of investment in the A9 dualling project.

Delivery of the Tourism Action Plan

- 5. The delivery of the Action Plan is overseen by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership which comprises key businesses, organisations and agencies involved in tourism in the Park. An assessment of delivery by partners against the actions set out in the Action Plan is provided at **Annex 1**. Following the evaluation visit in May 2017, Europarc made recommendations for areas of work that required further work over the life of the Plan and these are included as a reminder in **Annex 2**. These recommendations have been discussed with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership and integrated into relevant work plans.

- 6. Key highlights in the programme of work include:
 - a) **Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP)** – the CBP continues to grow and now has over 385 members. This represents about 35% of businesses in the Park and compares well with average Chamber of Commerce participation level of 8-10%. CBP continues to work on promoting the National Park, supporting development projects and representing their members’ interests through advocacy activity. CBP also works pro-actively with neighbouring private-sector destination management organisations (e.g. VisitAberdeenshire) and has been influential in drawing in investment for the SnowRoads Scenic route and for marketing the Park. The annual CBP conference in November is a key event for tourism businesses and CBP markets the Park to the travel trade at Expo each year in April.

 - b) **Visitor Marketing** – Recent activity has focussed on promoting the winter experience in and around Badenoch and Strathspey to compensate for the closed funicular railway at Cairngorm. In February 2019 it was announced that a new £80k campaign “Discover the Cairngorms National Park” would be launched, drawing on the VisitScotland Growth Fund, targeting the international travel trade.

c) **Visitor Information:**

- i. Local Information Centres (LIC) – following a reduction in financial support for information centres by VisitScotland and local authorities, CNPA has agreed to support 10 centres with promotional material, information and interpretation materials. During the year the Ballater Visitor Information Centre was re-opened following long period of closure. Braemar Visitor Information Centre has closed and the building will be handed back to Aberdeenshire Council and work is required to develop a public information point or similar.
- ii. Visitor attractions – National Park interpretation is being installed in two key visitor attractions: Landmark in Carr-Bridge and Speyside Centre in Dulnain Bridge, the latter also agreeing to be an LIC.
- iii. Visitor Publications – in partnership with communities, 17 community path leaflets have been produced promoting the most-used low-ground paths. These leaflets are available on CNPA website and will also be accessible on an app in 2019. The Welcome, Gaelic Place Names, Hill Paths, Tread Lightly and Explore-for-a-Day leaflets, and the sponsored tear-off map, are also produced and widely circulated.
- iv. Web Information – The CBP website www.visitcairngorms.com promotes the park with wide range of information and business activity, offering member offers, itineraries and packages. The CNPA website aims to celebrate the special qualities of the National Park and encourage visitors to responsibly enjoy the outdoor experiences. Both websites have very good levels of engagement.

- d) **National Park Visitor Survey** - Since the Park was first designated, CNPA has commissioned a Park-wide visitor survey every five years gathering essential information on the visitor experience that has been widely used to influence programmes of work. The results have been widely shared in both summary form and in detail – see summary at link below <https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/150831CairngormsVisitorSurveySummary1.0.pdf>

Our fourth survey is due to start in May 2019 and over the 12 month period 2,500 visitors will be interviewed across the National Park. Data collected in the first six months is likely to be available in early 2020 with the full survey available in summer of 2020.

- e) **Visitor Numbers** - Since designation STEAM research has estimated the number of visitors coming to the National Park. The most recent estimates are for 2017 at 1.84m visitors an increase of 6.3 percent over the 2016 estimate.

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The number of visitors estimated in 2003, the year of designation, was 1.42m indicating an overall increase of nearly 30% over this 14 year period.

- f) **Visitor Giving Scheme** - In June 2018 the Board agreed to establish a Visitor Giving Scheme. In January 2019 the Finance and Delivery Committee agreed a Memorandum of Understanding that would be signed between the Cairngorms Trust and CNPA. The Cairngorms Trust is now leading development of the Scheme and the Trust Manager is making plans to launch the Scheme at the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend in May. The Cairngorms Trust is currently looking to invite local nature-based projects to apply for support funding with a small grants scheme opening later in the year.

- g) **Make it Yours Campaign** - Some 290 visitor-facing staff across the National Park have participated in this training programme which shares why the Cairngorms is designated a National Park, its special qualities and, using the visitor survey data, looks at the experiences and information people are likely to want. In 2019 our focus is working with partners in Local Information Centres and simplifying some of the information into an engaging web page or App that is accessible to everyone.

- h) **Europarc Conference** - As part of the Year of Young People 2018 the CNPA hosted the EUROPARC Conference “Inspired by the Next Generation” on 18-21 September. Over 600 European delegates, many under the age of 30, attended and the conference was formally opened by Mairi Gougeon, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment and closed by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The conference was the biggest gathering of National Parks and protected areas ever held in Europe with world class speakers presenting their views on how to get young people more involved in nature. Delegates also enjoyed a wide selection of workshops and field trips across the Cairngorms National Park as well as social evenings which celebrated Scottish Highland food, drink and music. The EUROPARC conference report has been prepared and will be published on the EUROPARC Federation website. A Youth Manifesto, launched at the conference, has led to the Cairngorms National Park Authority developing a Youth project to take forward the recommendations presented in the EUROPARC Youth Manifesto.

- i) **A9 Dualling project and multi-use paths** - A9 Dualling - CNPA, Highland Council and three Community Councils and others objected to the A9 dual carriageway design for Dalraddy to Slochd section due to it not having a multi-use path linking Aviemore to Carrbridge. Following this Transport Scotland has

agreed to commission a study to develop design options for such a path. Options will be determined by late summer 2019 and a commitment has been made to develop the route as part of the A9 dualling project if the timing of contact can be aligned.

- i. Kingussie and Dulnain Bridge communities have both been successful in securing Sustrans funding for a feasibility study to look at path needs to make multi-use access (walking and cycling) more accessible in and around the villages. Laggan community are also looking at the potential to fund a similar project.

j) Long Distance Routes:

- i. Speyside Way – planning consent and funds are now in place to construct the extension from Insh to Ruthven Barracks with completion scheduled for end of 2019 and the complete extension to Newtonmore being ready to open in spring 2020. Work being undertaken in Kingussie has the potential to improve the route from Ruthven to the village. Funding has also been secured to upgrade the existing route between Aviemore and Boat of Garten. In 2019 CNPA will lead work re-developing the information, interpretation and signage along the whole route.
- ii. Deeside Way – planning consent has been obtained to construct a path linking Invercauld Bridge with the existing paths running east of Ballater. The next stage is to investigate potential funding support but it should be noted that the current non-tarmac design is not likely to meet Sustrans criteria.

- k) Cairngorm and Glenmore** - The Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership was formed in 2014 comprising CNPA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highland Council. The purpose of the Partnership is to co-ordinate future management of the land in public ownership at Cairngorm and Glenmore, and a long term strategy, approved by all partners in October 2016, was the first stage in this work.

Since then, the significant challenges of managing Cairngorm Mountain and, to a lesser extent the restructuring of Forestry Enterprise Scotland (FES), has impeded delivery of the Strategy. Following restructuring FES will now be developing a new visitor management plan for the area. CNPA has been successful in securing funding from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to build a tarmac, multi-use path linking the beach to Hayfield in Glenmore in autumn 2019. Following that work the partners will need to get together and agree further priorities in delivery of the strategy.

The issues surrounding the Cairngorm Mountain and CNPA's role are considered in a separate paper on this agenda.

- l) **Badenoch Great Place Project** - The ongoing delivery of the scheme has potential to positively improve the visitor experience in this area based on the area's heritage. Two specific examples are:
- i. Interpretation & Marketing Plan – work is underway to create an interpretation plan that celebrates and promotes the wide-ranging cultural heritage of this area;
 - ii. Alternative Tourist Route – a scoping study is underway to look at a way of encouraging travellers to leave the A9 Trunk Road and enjoy the wide ranging experiences from Dalwhinnie to Kincaig. Where appropriate CNPA are linking this with opportunities to promote the Spey and Speyside Way.

- m) **SnowRoads Scenic Route** - CBP launched the SnowRoads Scenic Route Website and App at their conference in November 2018 and further raised awareness with four half day workshops in communities along the route in February 2019. This work won the Aberdeen City and Shire 2018 Tourism Award for innovation.

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. This work very effectively links to a wide range of developing visitor experiences in eastern Cairngorms.

Tourist signs for the route in Highland & Moray are still awaiting installation.

- n) **Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership** - The ongoing delivery of this project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, will positively improve the visitor experience in this area. Two specific examples are:
- i. Discovery Centre – this information and interpretation centre, museum and office space opened in Spring 2018 and is now one of the Park's Local Information Centres.
 - ii. Tomintoul and Glenlivet – Cairngorms Dark Skies Park: The high quality of the night skies above Tomintoul and Glenlivet received a prestigious award in November 2018 by becoming Scotland's second International Dark Sky Park. Awarded Gold Tier status by the International Dark-Sky Association, the Dark Sky Park is the darkest in the UK and most

northerly Park in the world. This designation has considerable potential to encourage more visitors to the area, particularly in quieter, darker months.

o) Deeside and Donside

The delivery of a range of projects in Deeside/ Donside has potential to positively improve the visitor experience in this area. Four specific examples are:

- i. Ballater Visitor Information Centre – following fire in 2015 the station visitor centre, cafe and exhibition was re-opened in August 2018 displaying information about Deeside and Cairngorms National Park.
- ii. The Fife Arms was reopened in December 2018 following a substantial renovation to provide a very high quality hotel
- iii. Braemar Highland Games Centre opened in March 2019, combining a cafe with displays, and sharing the story of Scotland’s most well-know and best-attended highland games.
- iv. Strathdon – the former Colquhonnies Hotel received planning consent for a major renovation in February 2019 and is likely to open in 2020. Further new additional visitor accommodation is planned near Corgarff castle.

p) CATERAN COUNTRY - Community and partner support is now working on two significant visitor experience projects in the area of Glenshee and Blairgowrie:

- i. CATERAN ECOMUSEUM has now secured Leader Funding with support from CNPA and Perth and Kinross Council to create an outstanding new cultural destination in Scotland’s Tay Country extending into the Glenshee area of Cairngorms National Park. Designed to reveal the hidden heritage of this captivating part of Perthshire and Angus by the community who live there, the CATERAN Eco-museum tells the story of its people, places and landscapes.
- ii. CATERAN TRAIL – Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust are looking at options for improving and better promoting the CATERAN TRAIL.

Discussion

7. Overall, work on the Delivery of the Action Plan is progressing well and there are many exciting projects that have been recently developed or which will come to fruition in near future. In terms of process towards the targets set, we can report as follows:

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Target in National Park Partnership Plan 2017 - 2022	Update on progress
a) Increase the economic impact of visitors to eastern and southern Cairngorms National Park from 21% to 25% of the total visitor economy	2017 STEAM data shows economic impact of visitors in eastern and southern Cairngorms National Park, 22.8%.
b) Increase the percentage of visitors using active travel during their stay to 19% by 2022	2014/15 Visitor Survey indicates 16% of visitors using active travel.
c) Maintain or improve business perceptions of NP influence customer attraction and profitability	<p>CBP Business Barometer (Sep- Dec 2018): 64% of businesses stated that the Park had a high level of influence in attracting first time customers and overall level of influence was above the Q4 2017 as well as the Q4 Average and the Overall Average.</p> <p>52% of businesses stated that the Park had a high level of influence attracting repeat customers and overall level of influence was above Q4 2017 as well as the Q4 Average and Overall Average.</p>

8. Along with the work mentioned above and in **Annex I** the key highlights in the year ahead will be:
- a) Completion of the Park-wide Visitor Survey
 - b) Completion of the projects on the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership Project
 - c) Delivery of year 2 of the Badenoch Great Place Project
 - d) Launching the Visitor Giving Scheme
 - e) Influencing development of the review of the National Tourism strategy
 - f) Development of sustainable plans for Cairngorm Mountain
 - g) Completion of at least two Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund projects – at Muir of Dinnet NNR and at Glenmore NNR – and, if approved, two more at Braemar and at Cairngorm Mountain
 - h) Reinvigorating delivery arrangements for Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy
 - i) Submission of two applications for the SNH Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund
 - j) Completion of Speyside Way Extension
 - k) Delivery of Growth Fund Marketing programme for the SnowRoads
 - l) Preparing the for introduction of the Transient Visitor Levy

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- m) Joint work with neighbouring regional destinations (e.g. VisitAberdeenshire, Moray Speyside and Tay Cities) to our mutual benefit
 - n) Progression of agreement with the Chinese protected area with a possibility of reciprocal visit
 - o) A modest programme of activity for the themed Year of Scotland's Coasts and Waters
9. It is proposed that the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership complete a mid-term review of the Tourism Action Plan at end of 2019 for submission to the Board and to Europarc in early 2020.

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