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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR DECISION

**Title:** Enhancing Delivery of Natural and Cultural Heritage Projects

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### Purpose

To consider options to enhance delivery of natural and cultural heritage priorities in the Park including a review of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and the potential for a trust model of delivery.

### Recommendations

That the Board:

- a) Endorses the direction of changes proposed by the LBAP management group and considers how the LBAP partnership can be most effective in delivering the National Park Plan.
- b) Considers the principle of establishing a trust mechanism to deliver natural and cultural heritage projects and provides an initial steer on options for further consideration.

### Executive Summary

Delivery of natural and cultural heritage projects is primarily directed through the LBAP and Community Heritage Projects at present. The opportunity to engage more people and organisations, a need to revise funding structures and establish more effective mechanisms to attract and disburse financial and other contributions has led to a number of proposals for change. These changes are being considered now in order that the transition to new structures and ways of working can be embedded in the change to the next National Park Plan.

The LBAP management group has identified revision of the LBAP plan itself, the composition of the partnership and the way in which projects are structured and funded as three key areas requiring change in order to secure future funding and maximise the opportunities to deliver. The Community Heritage Project comes to an end in 2011 and follow-on arrangements need to be considered now.

A Trust mechanism is proposed as a key delivery mechanism for both natural and cultural heritage projects – to increase capacity, raise and use funds more effectively, and to engage a wider range of partners than current arrangements. An initial steer on the principle and options for a trust mechanism is sought.

## ENHANCING DELIVERY OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE PROJECTS - FOR DECISION

1. There is a wide range of organisations and individuals that share an interest in conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the Cairngorms National Park. Many of these are willing and able to make an active contribution in some form. While current delivery mechanisms have made a good start, we are not making as much as we could of the potential to pool this interest and maximise the benefits for the Park as a whole.
2. This paper recommends that the Board consider changes to our current delivery mechanisms including a review of role of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership and the potential for a Heritage/Conservation Trust as a means to engage others more effectively and increase capacity to deliver natural and cultural heritage projects.

### Drivers for Considering Changes

3. CNPA's enabling approach to delivery of the National Park Plan has led us to invest in developing and supporting independent delivery mechanisms that are embedded within the communities of interest in the National Park. This approach offers many benefits to CNPA and to the Park as a whole, including the provision of long term delivery structures that engage and pool the efforts of those that have a direct interest in and/or responsibility for day-to-day delivery.
4. To date these independent structures include:
  - a) Cairngorms Business Partnership – delivering the aims of the Park through and for the business community;
  - b) Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust – delivering the aims of the Park through outdoor access and recreation;
  - c) Cairngorms LEADER – delivering the aims of the Park through and for communities;
5. To date, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Partnership has been a key delivery mechanism for biodiversity projects and the Community Heritage Project established in 2009 for two years is the principal mechanism for delivering cultural heritage projects. In both cases, there are a number of drivers for considering change now to secure future delivery.
6. The particular drivers for considering these changes are:

### ***Securing future funding and delivery***

7. Delivery of natural and cultural heritage projects has so far been focused through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership and the Community Heritage Project. The Community Heritage Project is a time-limited project funded through LEADER and CNPA which comes to an end in 2011. We therefore need to identify how best to secure the legacy of this project and ensure that appropriate support for cultural heritage work remains.

8. The LBAP management group has agreed that some change is necessary in order to continue to draw in partner funding. The current structure and funding model of LBAP is shown below. Likely reductions in partner funding and changes in their funding priorities means that the current model is unlikely to be sustainable from 2011/12 onwards and therefore the capacity to delivery biodiversity projects is at risk of significant decline.

#### ***Engaging people and organisations***

9. These proposals seek to establish a better way to engage and pool the interest, effort and resources of a wide range of people and organisations who want to contribute to the natural and cultural heritage of the Park. Whilst the Park Authority can achieve so much through formal partnerships and co-ordination with public bodies, the long term management of the Park needs to tap into the enthusiasm of the private sector, NGOs and individuals. Many of these are more likely to engage with the concept of the Park, and therefore partnership/independent mechanisms, than they would with the Park Authority as a public body.

#### ***Transparent financial investment opportunities***

10. The changes also seek to establish a transparent mechanism for handling financial contributions towards the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage, giving confidence to individuals and funders of direct investment in projects – with the long term aim of increasing the level of investment. Contributions are in future likely to come from a variety of sources in addition to conventional grant funding, including, for example, through the developer contributions policy or visitor contribution schemes.

### **Changes to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Partnership**

11. The LBAP partnership is overseen by a management group comprising the current funding bodies and is chaired by an independent chair, currently Kenny Taylor. The group comprises the following organisations; their financial contribution to the LBAP for the 2010/11 financial year is shown in brackets:
  - a) CNPA (£24,000)
  - b) Scottish Natural Heritage (£15,000)
  - c) Aberdeenshire Council (£1,500)
  - d) Angus Council (£1,000)
  - e) Highland Council (funding withdrawn this year)
12. In previous years the three Local authorities had each contributed £2,500.
13. Current LBAP project delivery is focused into two streams. Firstly, the grant scheme assists communities to deliver their own specific projects, this includes work such as habitat creation. Secondly, projects delivering action for species and habitats on the Cairngorms priority list. This includes projects such wetland restoration work and the rare plant project.
14. The LBAP management group has proposed that the LBAP should be reviewed and restructured in order to:
  - a) Adapt to changing funding priorities and reductions in core funding in order to secure ongoing delivery

- b) Review the Local Biodiversity Action Plan in line with review of the National Park Plan – to result in a refreshed LBAP showing how the biodiversity priorities of the Park will be delivered in a five year plan.
  - c) Review the boundary of the LBAP area in the light of the extension of the National Park - with a view to matching the area of the plan to the Park boundary while retaining the ability to work jointly with neighbouring LBAPs across the boundary.
  - d) Review the membership of the LBAP management group – with a view to ensuring effective engagement drawing in those that can contribute effectively, not limited to core funders.
15. These changes are intended to secure a more sustainable funding model for LBAP and to increase the status and capacity of the partnership to take the lead in co-ordinating delivery of biodiversity action in the Park – ready for implementation of the next National Park Plan. In particular, a refreshed LBAP should draw the NGO sector more effectively into a co-ordinated approach to conserving and enhancing the Park’s natural and cultural heritage.
16. It is likely that in future LBAP projects will be larger and deliver the variety of outcomes currently achieved but in a package more aligned to funding partner objectives. These will also allow a reasonable management cost component to be built in to support officer time. The change to any new form of delivery, such as a trust as outlined below, is likely to take time and may be spread over more than one financial year.

## Recommendation

17. **That the Board endorses the direction of changes proposed by the LBAP management group and considers how the LBAP partnership can be most effective in delivering the National Park Plan.**

## Cultural Heritage – Looking Beyond the Community Heritage Project

18. The Community Heritage Project has been very successful at supporting new and existing heritage projects around the park (active support to 26 projects to date). The level of support has varied considerably between groups depending upon their own capacity and confidence. A focus for the second year of this two year project will be to develop a clearer strategy for cultural heritage within the CNP and to further enhance the capacity of communities to undertake projects. This second element will be achieved through direct capacity building with training and facilitating increased communication, and consequently mutual support, among the various communities. A more proactive partnership with local authorities is key to more strategic co-ordination.
19. Beyond the end of the project in August 2011 there will still be a need for direct support for specific projects as well and additional training and other capacity building. In a similar manner to the LBAP work a number of projects could be packaged together to form cohesive but large single projects. This again would still allow for the multiple outcomes (in terms of the range of projects supported) but

allow for an element of management cost to be included to enable effective co-ordination to be maintained. Such projects might include establishing a support network, training skills for recording built heritage or oral history as well as delivery of specific community projects according to set themes.

### **Developing a Trust to Deliver Natural and Cultural Heritage Projects**

20. In addition to the changes proposed to the LBAP partnership, the development of a trust mechanism could be an effective way to secure and in time increase project delivery capacity for both natural and cultural heritage projects. The model of a trust has been used successfully elsewhere to deliver significant heritage projects, notably the Tweed Foundation and the Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust, and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority are also currently considering a trust mechanism for delivery. Our experience of the very successful establishment of the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust has shown the significant additional resource and delivery capacity that this model can create for the Park when well managed.
21. A trust would not replace the need for the LBAP partnership, or equivalent partner collaboration to steer cultural heritage policy, but could provide a more effective mechanism for project delivery. There remains a need for partner collaboration, led by CNPA, to set direction, agree priorities and co-ordinate the overall delivery of natural and cultural heritage conservation and enhancement, but a trust could become a key mechanism through which those partners deliver, as per the current interaction of COAT with a range of partners.
22. The remit of a trust would need to be sufficiently focused to ensure delivery and attract the necessary skills, but also able to adapt to changing priorities over time. The proposed starting point for the remit is to deliver projects contributing to conserving and enhancing the National Park's:
  - a) Biodiversity
  - b) Landscape
  - c) Geodiversity
  - d) Historic Environment
  - e) Cultural heritage
23. Building on the current delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the Community Heritage Project, a key theme for the trust's remit would be to support and deliver community projects as well as more strategic landscape-scale projects.

### **Initial Consideration of Options**

24. Annex I considers the relative advantages and disadvantages of three basic options for taking forward delivery of projects to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage:
  - a) Option A – No change from current arrangements (implies ongoing need to seek partners for individual projects)
  - b) Option B – Direct delivery by CNPA (implies greater direct delivery role than current arrangements)
  - c) Option C – Establishment of a Trust mechanism

25. The establishment of a Trust, while carrying some risks, appears to offer a number of benefits over and above either the current arrangements or greater direct delivery by CNPA – in particular the potential to secure a broader funding base and engage a wider range of interests more effectively and efficiently. With an effective delivery mechanism established, CNPA's own role could focus on leading the strategic and policy direction for natural and cultural heritage and co-ordinating delivery, for which a trust would be a key mechanism.
26. If the principle of establishing a Trust is accepted, then the next questions relate to options for its scope, structure and relationship to other bodies. Given that the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust has already been successfully established, there are two basic options to be considered first:
  - a) Option 1 – expand the role of the existing Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) to fulfil the wider conservation remit in addition to outdoor access;
  - b) Option 2 – establish a separate independent conservation trust that does not alter the remit of COAT.
27. There is also an option to consider a wider trust remit to embrace all aspects of sustainability as a way to allow for future opportunities beyond the outdoor access and conservation remits.
28. CNPA has recently had exploratory discussions about the potential to expand the role of COAT with the COAT Board of Directors. This was to introduce the idea and seek their advice and initial thoughts. The following issues were of particular concern and interest to the COAT Board.
  - a) The challenge and risks of incorporating natural and cultural heritage projects into the activity of the trust which has established a tightly defined role. Their current set up and skills within the staff and board may have to change considerably. The COAT 'brand' has been clearly established and expanding its remit may make its identity less clear.
  - b) COAT is able to manage its activity with a very low operating cost to capital ratio. The nature of the COAT capital programme allows this by having a smaller number of large projects rather than the other way around. Would the additional areas of remit be able to be delivered in this way, maintaining operational efficiency?
  - c) It took many years to establish UDAT and consequently COAT - expanding the role, or establishing a new trust, is likely to also take years rather than months. Consequently it is not a 'quick fix' for immediate pressures.
29. However, the board recognised that the expanded role could bring benefits of increased funding and a broader base giving it a more stable programme overall. A pilot project may help address some of the issues of concern. The board is open to the options though has significant concerns about potential implications. They requested that if the CNPA board wished to take the proposal further then a detailed paper inviting them to consider it formally is submitted in the future.

## Risks

30. There are of course risks to CNPA and delivery in establishing a trust mechanism including:
  - a) Financial risks
  - b) Reputational risks
31. However, our experience of working through COAT indicates that there are effective ways to mitigate these risks to an acceptable level. These and other risks would be addressed further in assessing the most effective options.

## Recommendation

32. **That the Board considers the principle of establishing a trust mechanism to deliver natural and cultural heritage projects and provides an initial steer on options for further consideration.**

## Consultation

33. The issues raised in this paper are informed by discussions with the LBAP partnership and COAT board of directors. Following the board's discussion, further consultation with relevant organisations, delivery teams and advisory forums will be scheduled.

## Policy Context

### ***Delivering Sustainability***

34. The paper outlines proposals to increase capacity to deliver natural and cultural heritage projects in future – helping to conserve and enhance the assets which underpin delivery of all four aims and the sustainability of the Park.

### ***Delivering A Park for All***

35. There are no direct implications on 'A Park for All'.

### ***Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency***

36. The paper outlines proposals intended to increase efficiency and effectiveness at a time when public sector budgets are reducing. It suggests actions that could be taken now in order to adapt to changing funding priorities and help secure future delivery as far as possible.

## Implications

### ***Financial Implications***

37. These proposals seek to establish more secure and efficient investment and delivery of natural and cultural heritage projects. The changes are however, likely to require a transition phase when CNPA will have to consider the extent to which our own resources should be directed to help establish the new mechanisms. Consideration of CNPA financial contributions to LBAP and any potential trust will be addressed through the usual operational plan and board decisions for the next financial year.

***Presentational Implications***

38. As changes to the LBAP are made, there is a need to communicate clearly the role of that group and the contribution it makes to the National Park. The development of a trust mechanism would also need to be well communicated – either in the case of changes to an existing organisation, or if a new trust is established – to explain how this mechanism fits into the wider picture of the Park’s management. Overall, there is an opportunity and challenge to increase the profile of work to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage.

***Implications for Stakeholders***

39. Some of the potential changes in this paper have significant implications for the way on which partners work on natural and cultural heritage in the Park. As such, they require a high level of communication and consultation over coming months, to maintain a clear sense of our purpose and goal. Setting these changes in the context of developing the next National Park Plan will provide a good framework for these discussions.

**Next Steps**

40. The LBAP management group will be agreeing the detailed arrangements for review of the plan, partnership and project structure by the end of 2010, taking into account the board’s views.
41. Depending on the board’s steer on the potential trust mechanism, further work on detailed options will be carried out with partners and we anticipate bringing a further paper to the board setting out those options with recommendations before the end of the current financial year.

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