

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

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### FOR DISCUSSION

**Title: BADENOCH GREAT PLACE PROJECT**

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#### **Purpose**

This paper provides a summary and brief review of the Badenoch Great Place Project (BGPP) which completed delivery on 30 Sep 2021.

#### **Recommendations**

**The Performance Committee is asked to:**

- a) **Note the achievements of the Project and all that it has delivered;**
- b) **Note the key challenges and learning points arising from the project;  
and**
- c) **Consider the legacy arrangements that have been put in place and how the impact of the project can be maximised as the next NP Partnership Plan is developed.**

#### **Strategic Summary**

- I. The Badenoch Great Place Project (BGPP), with the sub-title “*Badenoch Heritage: Bringing the Past to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Project*”, was a three-year, £438,000 partnership project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and others. The project was completed on 30 Sept. 2021. The Project had four aims – to deliver a Place:
  - a) Where there is a strong destination within the Cairngorms National Park and Scotland with a reputation based on its heritage, where the many key heritage attractions and features of interest are promoted to create a great visitor;
  - b) Where the rich heritage assets are turned into a wide range of experiences and economic opportunities;
  - c) Where a wider range of people are more directly involved in caring for and presenting the area’s heritage; and
  - d) Which is managed by a sustainable partnership of organisations and communities who work and embed heritage at the heart of their plans.

2. An interim report was presented to the CNPA Board in March 2021 as part of a review of major projects and is available here (refer to the final Board paper): <https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/meetings/meeting/board-2021-03-12/>
3. The project was based on developing a partnership of public agencies and community bodies to employ one project manager and a modest budget over three years. There were no funds for capital development projects. A draft version of the final project report is attached at **Annex I**.

### Key Achievements of the Project

4. A package of over 20 interconnected sub-projects included research; creation of visual, digital and audio materials; branding, destination development and place-making; heritage celebration; stimulation of a new local charity; training and volunteer development; and marketing and interpretation. The project culminated with a week-long Badenoch Heritage Festival, a celebration conference on 25<sup>th</sup> Sept, and a presentation at the international “Interpret Europe” Conference.
5. The Project brought an increased awareness of the cultural heritage that exists within this part of the National Park and the opportunities that exist to celebrate and utilise it. It has brought communities and partner organisations together around a common theme.
6. The final project evaluation, undertaken to a format that is set by the major funding partner NLHF, is still under way. Further information on the Project can be found at the new, community-managed website for the destination at <https://badenochstorylands.com/>.
7. Notwithstanding the inevitable challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Project delivered on all the aims and the majority of the originally envisaged outcomes and achieved almost full expenditure. The project also attracted a further £21,500 of new match-funding (from Historic Environment Scotland, Green Recovery Fund and Big Lottery) into the area.
8. Where it was not possible to deliver specific actions (such as recruiting a second cohort of Volunteer Ambassadors due to the pandemic) the project adapted the delivery programme to take advantage of emerging opportunities, in this case working with the Folk Museum’s volunteers instead.
9. Key outputs of the project included:
  - a) Identification of the top 77, out of 3000+, identified sites in the area, and development of associated stories and themes around them.
  - b) Creation and promotion of the “Badenoch: The Storylands” brand.
  - c) Destination development including marketing materials and new walking, cycling and driving itineraries.
  - d) Destination promotion with VisitScotland, local business skills-building and travel-trade promotion.
  - e) Development and launch of new community-managed website for the area [www.badenochstorylands.com](http://www.badenochstorylands.com).

- f) Development and launch of innovative Mobile App which includes augmented reality images, 13 itineraries plus embedded stories and music.
- g) All associated imagery, audio and visual materials including aerial photography, story collation and recording, music composition, mapping, digital creations and various films.
- h) Comprehensive Gaelic place-name language study and a Shinty Trail
- i) Recruitment and training of Volunteer Ambassadors.
- j) Organising and delivering four heritage festivals: 2018 (physical), 2019 (physical), 2020 (virtual) and 2021 (mixed), final celebration Conference and concert.
- k) Delivering multiple events including walks, talks, and skills-based events and working with local schools on heritage careers.
- l) Creation of a Digital Archive at Am Baille <https://www.ambaile.org.uk>.
- m) Creation of the Story of Badenoch film (featuring Ruthven barracks).
- n) Delivering additional projects including the Badenoch Storylands Sessions and the Croft Gowan Archaeological Dig.

## Key Challenges and Lessons Learned

- 10. **Top down and bottom-up:** This project was built on strong foundations of partner and community engagement. The area had been identified as a priority area in NP Partnership Plan. The local community had just finished some significant auditing of local heritage assets. The Project Manager was employed by a local community body, Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey, and was based in the Badenoch area to promote local leadership and buy-in.
- 11. **Achieving full partner buy-in:** It was relatively easy to get organisations to fund the project and come along to Board meetings – but much harder for them to embed what the project was trying to do and get greater value for the place out of their day-to-day operations.
- 12. **Covid – 19 Pandemic:** This resulted in the Project effectively losing the whole 2020 Spring/Autumn. Thankfully a 9-month extension was negotiated and this was crucial in enabling the destination development work to reach the stage it is now at.
- 13. **Managing complexity:** Even with a modest budget this was a complex project to manage with lots of interdependencies. In order to keep it on track, both CNPA and VABS have had to invest more of their time that was originally envisaged to get effective outputs. Lack of project staff resource when the original Project Officer left, meant some non-specialist elements were contracted out. These contracts also needed to be procured and then managed, themselves taking up staff time.
- 14. **Project structure:** This sometimes exacerbated the complex management and administration issues. CNPA was the Lead Partner and accountable body for the NLHF and other funding (so had all the financial and procurement responsibility) but the Project Officer was employed by a partner organisation. There was sometimes a disconnect between project activity and CNPA administrative processes, adding another layer of complexity.

15. **Project Management:** Proper planning and budget management and clear procedures from the start will pay dividends as the project progresses. This is a Project responsibility and resource at the appropriate level should be factored into the project team from Day 1.
16. **Sub-destinations and the Park:** The key visitor/tourism initiatives or destinations within the Park, each of which is trying to strengthen their offering in a sustainable and locally-managed way (e.g. Badenoch, Tomintoul and Glenlivet area, the Dark Sky Park, Snow Roads Scenic Route, Catearan Country, etc.) all need to be anchored within the National Park and promoted consistently and learning off each other. This is a key issue to consider in the development of the NP Partnership Plan and the associated Tourism Action Plan.

### Legacy Arrangements

17. The Project has put the building blocks in place from which it is hoped the community and partners will continue to develop the area to sustain a vibrant rural community and a place tourists will choose to visit and prolong their stay.
18. A Legacy Plan has been prepared and implementation will be overseen by a Legacy Board which will consist of VABS (Chair), CNPA, Badenoch Heritage and the Cairngorms Business Partnership – the CBP will be a crucial partner in promoting the area as a destination. The Legacy Plan outlines how the investment made during the project will be secured and developed for the future. The aspiration is that the legacy will facilitate new projects that will build on the communities' assets and result in new opportunities for ongoing community benefit. A Marketing Plan specifies the key activities that are required in the short, medium and longer term to support the destination development. CNPA are supporting the initial phase of work via Badenoch Heritage to ensure basic infrastructure such as interpretation panels and information is in place for the 2022 tourist season and can be managed sustainably.
19. The Storyland Sessions, one ongoing and innovative legacy project that was stimulated by the Cairngorms Green Recovery Fund, is very well summarised here <https://www.merrynglover.com/the-storylands-sessions/>
20. VisitScotland has designated the coming year as "Scotland's Year of Stories 2022" which will be a showcase of the country's rich literature, oral traditions, myths and legends. Lord Thurso (VisitScotland) Chair made the point at the celebration conference that the Badenoch Project has already set the standard for what other projects should now try and achieve.

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