

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: The Rural Development Programme – Consultation Response and Pilot Project

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Purpose

To seek approval of the CNPA's response to the consultation on the implementation of the Rural Development Programme. This includes proposals for a pilot project for the CNPA to play a strategic role and involve a range of stakeholders to:

- agree the priorities for the programme in the Cairngorms;
- establish and oversee an effective advisory mechanism that delivers high quality applications under the programme; and
- to monitor and review the outcomes of the programme.

Recommendations

That the Board approves the consultation response for submission to the Scottish Executive.

Executive Summary

The Scottish Rural Development Programme brings together a wide range of rural support including LEADER +, Less Favoured Area Support Scheme, agri-environment schemes, SNH's Natural Care schemes and forestry schemes. It provides an opportunity to help deliver all 7 priorities in the draft Park Plan. The consultation response sets out our position on its implementation to maximise the opportunities and minimise the threats from these changes. It is based on integrated land management and other policy development undertaken to date.

The Rural Development Programme – Consultation Response and Pilot Project – For Decision

Background

1. Board has previously identified the integration of public support systems to avoid duplication and contradictions as an early priority. Board has also previously agreed the need to identify priority public benefits for the CNP. It has also proposed a more outcome based approach for public sector support to deliver the priorities. This support includes funding, advice, training, regulation and demonstration projects.
2. The implementation of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) offers an opportunity to make progress on these issues. Further information about the background to this paper is provided in the introduction section of the consultation response, in annex 1.

Issues/Discussion

3. The response to the consultation is set out in annex 1. The response includes a proposal for a pilot project for the Cairngorms. The pilot project sets out a strategic role for the CNPA to work with a wide range of stakeholders to support high quality applications that will help deliver the priorities in the Cairngorms. It also aims to monitor and review the effectiveness of the programme.
4. In brief, the CNPA's strategic role will be to set up a Cairngorms Regional Committee which will build on the current LEADER + Local Action Group. It will involve a wide range of stakeholders including land manager representatives, public agencies, local communities, local businesses and national communities of interest. The Committee will:
 - a) identify the priorities for the SRDP in the Cairngorms and the measures required for their delivery;
 - b) establish and oversee an effective advisory mechanism; and
 - c) work closely with the Scottish Executive to monitor the outcomes delivered by the SRDP and use this as a basis to review its implementation.
5. There are some risks in developing this pilot approach:
 - a) care is needed to carefully manage the expectations of stakeholders as to the scope of this pilot approach as there are many uncertainties over the implementation of the SRDP over the next few months;
 - b) it is essential that participants are not disadvantaged in comparison to the rest of Scotland. Although it is usual for participants in pilot projects to benefit from their involvement, we will carefully monitor the situation and take action if disadvantage is identified; and
 - c) there is likely to be a very limited budget for the SRDP in Scotland for the next few years. It is essential that the funding framework is communicated

clearly and that the Scottish Executive clearly remains as the decision maker on budgets.

Recommendation

6. That the Board approves the consultation response for submission to the Scottish Executive.

Consultation

7. Consultations have been held with CNPA's Rural Development Regulation group, and other Heads of Group. The paper has also benefited from an informal Board discussion session. The proposals for the pilot project have also been explored with the Scottish Executive. There has also been contact and discussions with a wide range of other stakeholders on the future of the Scottish Rural Development Regulation in the Cairngorms.

Policy Context

8. The SRDP encompasses a wide range of public sector support. This work on its implementation will help deliver the following strategic aims of the Corporate Plan:
 - a) To enable current and future generations to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the Park in a way which fosters those qualities and supports the activities of others.
 - b) To promote sustainable resource, land and water management; and to protect and enhance our wildlife and landscapes;
 - c) To support and stimulate economic and social development within the Park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities;
 - d) To ensure our commitment to future generations we will look beyond the horizon and put in place plans to guide and co-ordinate the long term integrated management of the Park.
9. The Draft Park Plan proposes 7 priorities for action:
 - a) Conserving and enhancing the Park's biodiversity and landscapes
 - b) Developing sustainable deer management
 - c) Developing integrated land management
 - d) Providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access
 - e) Making housing affordable and sustainable
 - f) Making tourism and businesses sustainable
 - g) Developing awareness and understanding of the Park.
10. The SRDP provides an opportunity to use national policies and support systems to help deliver each of the seven proposed Priorities for Action, with particular opportunities for developing integrated land management.

Delivering Sustainability

11. The consultation response on the implementation of the SRDP, and the project plan can help deliver economic, environmental and social sustainability in the CNP. It provides support through grants, regulation, advice and training to help a wide range of participants to deliver the 4 aims of the CNP.

Delivering a Park for All

12. The implementation of the SRDP could enable more people the chance to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the CNP. It can also increase social justice by allowing more people to become involved in deciding the priorities for the SRDP, and more two-way communication between participants and local and national communities.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

13. Part of the drive behind these changes to rural policy is to increase integration and deliver increased economy, effectiveness and efficiency. In theory, there should be less contradiction and overlap between schemes, and less bureaucracy for the participants. We will monitor this, for example by comparing the public sector administrative costs of the previous set of schemes with the SRDP, and use the results to ensure that efficiency is achieved.

Implications

Financial Implications

14. There will be staff time involved in setting up and servicing the pilot project. This is provisionally allocated for in the current operational plan. We have discussed costs with the Scottish Executive and will ensure that we maximise the partnership working and funding opportunities that are available.

Presentational Implications

15. There are presentational implications arising from the paper. We have already undertaken some work with stakeholders. However, over the next few months, we will be discussing this in much more detail with a range of stakeholders.

Implications for Stakeholders

16. The changes to the SRDP and the integration of a wide range of rural support, coupled with the likely low level of funding mean that there are some potentially very important implications for a wide range of stakeholders. The pilot project sets a structure to enable the stakeholders to become involved with the decision making process, and monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the SRDP.

Next Steps

17. The consultation response will be submitted to the Scottish Executive in the first week of July. A small extension to their deadline has been agreed. We will then be discussing the development of the pilot proposal with the Scottish Executive and a wide range of other partners. We will report back to Board on progress. If all proceeds as planned, will bring a decision back to Board on the detail of the project.

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