
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT

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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) **Capercaillie Framework** – A bid to HLF is being prepared with a view to submission in spring 2017, the funding is to support work identified in the Capercaillie Framework across habitat and recreation management, awareness and communications.
- b) **Woodland expansion** – The Cairngorms Nature seminar on 28th June was well attended by over a hundred people from a wide variety of sectors. A common theme was the need to encourage increased diversity of forest types and tree species to support not only biodiversity but local saw mills, and the guard against the dangers of disease. We recently met with FCS and SNH to discuss new ways of encouraging woodland creation through increased incentives and to discuss the review of the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework, due after the Partnership Plan consultation.
- 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) **Catchment Partnerships** – The Spey Catchment Initiative is finalising its review of the catchment management plan, aiming to complete by end of September. The Dee Catchment Partnership, now chaired by CNPA, is also reviewing its delivery plan following the devastating floods. The Pearls in Peril project has been extended to enable completion of the work underway.
- e) **Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership** – We hope to hear by 20th September whether or not the HLF funding bid for the £3.6m 'delivery phase' has been successful. All being well, we will begin recruitment of staff, beginning with the

Programme Manager. In the first year the main projects getting started are the stabilisation of Blairfindy Castle, conversion of the Tomintoul Museum into a new Discovery Centre and creation of a new bird hide.

- f) **Moorland Management** – We have just received confirmation that we have been successful in obtaining funding through ECAF (Environmental Co-operation Action Fund) for the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership. This will fund project development work to enhance habitat and species diversity.
- g) **Landscape** – The Cairngorms Scenic Photo-post project is to expand with up to a dozen more posts to be in place within the next year. The project has been short listed for this year's Nature of Scotland award in the Innovation category. In addition a contract has been let, with funding from SNH; to develop the descriptions of the two nationally designated 'wild land areas' in the National Park.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **The Mountains and People Project** – In Aberdeenshire; half of the Lochnagar plateau path upgrade is completed and as is half of Dubh Loch path. Work on Lochangar main path has been tendered. In Angus, work on Jock's Road and Glittering Skellies paths is complete while about 20% of the work on Mayar path is done. Work in Perthshire is focusing on Beinn a Ghlo on the paths beyond the main face of Carn Liath. Eight Cairngorm trainees are in the middle of their second month of the scheme.
- b) **Speyside Way** – We are awaiting the outcome of a funding application to SRDP for the section to Insh, and planning permission will be submitted this autumn. Construction of this section is unlikely before spring 2017 pushing back the potential competition to Kingussie to 2018.
- c) **Deeside Way** - We are awaiting the outcome of 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.
- d) **Active Cairngorms** - The first of the three GP referral schemes has started health walks in Tomintoul, with Ballater and Aviemore delayed to September.
- e) **Volunteering** – We made a successful application to Leader for three years funding to cover the costs of supporting a volunteer programme; This together with core funds from CNPA and funding support from Paths for All and NHS Highland allow us to recruit a three year full time volunteer co-coordinator to; maintain and improve the existing health walks programme, develop volunteer rangers, and wider environmental volunteering. We anticipate that the new coordinator will be in post late October.
- f) **Youth engagement** - Four Junior Rangers from the Cairngorms enjoyed a Europarc Junior Range Camp in Latvia. Some 2,185 people have completed a John Muir Award this year. The delivery of the award across the area remains a key way of encouraging young people to enjoy and appreciate the National Park.

- g) **Inclusion** - The CNPA travel grant to encourage underrepresented groups to visit the National Park is fully subscribed for 2016. The Backbone project to develop community leaders in and around both national parks has entered its second year. Participants have engaged over 2500 people from BME and marginalised communities through their community engagement initiatives.
- h) **Snow Roads Scenic Route** - Work is nearing completion on the site at Glenshee with the Tomintoul site due to complete at the end of September. Cairngorms Business Partnership has been successful in obtaining funds from Scottish Enterprise for a Destination Development programme to work with local businesses and tourism groups to develop the route. Work on route development is likely to start in the autumn.

Rural Development:

- a) **Development Management** – Before the end of 2016, the Planning Committee should determine applications for housing at Beachen Court, Grantown-on-Spey, a retrospective track at Cairngorm Mountain, the renovation of Derry Lodge to hostel accommodation on Mar Lodge Estate as well as small housing proposals in Aviemore and Newtonmore and commercial developments in Grantown-on-Spey and Balavil Estate near Kingussie.
- b) **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. Working with partners, the Cairngorms LAG, and with LEADER funding the CNPA are leading the project which will help us to better prioritise future activity and support for communities and to gather the evidence required to help us do this effectively. If successful, the project could be rolled out more widely.
- c) **Tomintoul and Glenlivet** – We continue to work with this community and provide support to the Development Trust helping them to employ an officer and take forward projects. We also facilitate the ‘Transform Team’ bringing together public sector partners and key community groups to ensure continued collaboration and delivery for the area. The Trust has recently been successful in their application for the asset transfer of the Smuggler’s Hostel and the Tomintoul Visitor Information Centre and Museum from Moray Council. The Trust is currently exploring further opportunities to generate income to help reduce their reliance on the public sector and become more sustainable in the future.
- d) **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** - 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 re-applying to Europarc for accreditation using the new National Park Partnership Plan as the strategic context for delivering sustainable tourism in the CNP. An updated Tourism Action Plan setting out how this will be delivered in terms of priorities, actions, and partners is now being developed with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership and will be brought to the Board in December before being submitted to Europarc.
- e) **Make It Yours Project** – this project is designed to help everyone make the most of being in a National Park. The project brings together the work of the Rural Development team, Visitor Services team and Communications team and aims to grow the CNP as a brand and the connection of people with that brand. We have

delivered interactive presentations with 15 organisations and 126 visitor facing staff so far to help them grow their knowledge about the National Park. We have also produced [support materials](#) including images, videos and a Park map that are available free of charge online. A pilot using a 'tear –off' map of the Park to use with visitors has been sent to VICs, Ranger bases and major visitor attractions and accommodation providers over the summer. We are seeking feedback from these businesses to determine whether this will help promote the Park and the key attractions and activities it has to offer. Feedback so far has been very positive. We are also working with VisitScotland to see how this project can link in with their 'iKnow Scotland' scheme.

- f) **Visitor Marketing** – working with the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) and VisitScotland we are supporting a collaborative marketing campaign aimed at encouraging a greater geographical spread of visitors across the National Park throughout the year. We are also working with VisitScotland, CBP, and the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership to produce a marketing strategy for the Cairngorms National Park. This will help to inform the focus, target audience, and messaging of future campaigns and to enable all areas of the National Park, local businesses and groups to link into wider marketing activity.
- g) **Conferences** – Working with the Highland Council we have been successful in our bid to bring an International Mountain Bike Conference to Aviemore from 17th-19th November and we are working with local businesses and local cycling businesses in particular, to help them make the most of this great opportunity. CNPA staff from the Rural Development and Outdoor Access teams will be directly involved in the conference itself. We are also working with Ramblers Scotland and Event Scotland on a potential bid to bring the 'Eurorando' European Ramblers Conference to the Cairngorms National Park in 2021. The Conference is held every 5 years and attracts over 5,000 delegates from around Europe. It is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the National Park to these high value customers and to their wider networks.
- h) **Cairngorms Community Broadband** - We continue to support the development of a community-led broadband project that has been specifically tailored to address the hardest to reach areas of the National Park. A company associated with the Cairngorms Trust has been registered with Companies House and charitable status will be sought. A consultation, led by Community Broadband Scotland, is about to be launched to scope the area for investment and clear the way for a significant investment by CBS in an aggregated scheme. CNPA is making a part-time staff resource [David Watson, 2.5 days through to end of March] available for the next 6 months to help establish the company and secure medium term funding.
- i) **A9 Dualling** – The Stage 2 consultation response on Project 9, Crubenmore to Kincaig was considered by the Planning Committee in September. The consultation on Project 10, Dalraddy to Slochd is expected in late September and is the last of the Stage 2 consultations for projects within the National Park. CNPA staff are also working more widely with Transport Scotland forums for the A9 including forums on outdoor access, community, business, tourism, environment etc. We are working closely with Transport Scotland and VisitScotland on tourism issues in particular and opportunities and the potential for enhanced laybys in the National Park.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) There have been a large number of meetings held with organisations to support the development of the Park Partnership Plan consultation including the AoCC, Inclusive Cairngorms, CLOAF, SLE, RSPB, SE LINK, Estates, CDAG, Cairngorms Economic Forum, Local Authorities and relevant public agencies.
- b) There have also been meetings with Katie Forbes MSP, John Finnie MSP, David Stewart MSP, Graeme Dey MSP, Edward Mountain MSP and new Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham MSP also came to the Park to discuss Cairngorms Connect and visit the community hydro site in Kingussie.

Communications:

- a) **National Park Partnership Plan Consultation** - The [NPPP Consultation](#) launched on Monday 27th June ends on 30th September and at the start of September 120 responses had been received. At the end of the consultation all responses will be taken into account before a final National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 is prepared for Ministerial approval in Spring 2017. The final NPPP will provide the framework for the main issues report for the next Local Development Plan 2020-2025 which will go out for formal consultation during 2017.
- b) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign** - The [Cairngorms Nature Young Presenter Competition](#) was launched in June and closes on 31st October – it invites 10-16 year olds to enter a nature video and confirm why they love Cairngorms Nature. Plans for next year's Cairngorms Nature Festival are already underway – to take place 13th & 14th May 2017. It aims to increase the number of attendees while delivering a high quality experience for all those who take part. At the Grantown show, the [Cairngorms Nature Farm Award winner](#), Jim Simmons of Ruthven Farm in Glenlivet, was announce, and the Pride of the Park Awards were presented. Cairngorms Nature Facebook has 7071 followers and Cairngorms Nature Twitter has over 1608 followers.
- c) **Active Cairngorms** - The first '[Wee Walks Week](#)' was held w/c 5th September to encourage local residents to be more active on a regular basis with 42 groups registered to take part involving 327 people (excluding CNPA staff). [Local Health Walks](#) are also providing regular opportunities for people in every community to participate and a GP 'natural health' referral pilot is being set up in three locations across the Park. Active Twitter now has 1312 followers and Active Facebook 385.
- d) **Corporate Communications** – Work to continually improve our website is currently focussed on the [Discover & Explore](#) section aimed at visitors to the Park and our social media activities has over 15,000 followers. The CNPA [Gaelic Language Plan progress report](#) was submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig in July and is available on our website and an application for support funding of £2,500 from the GLAIF has been successful. An MSP opinion survey about both Scottish National Parks will be carried out in the autumn to establish their familiarity and favourability towards both Parks

and their engagement needs. Our Annual Review & Accounts will be submitted to Ministers for approval and made available on our website in October.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project** – The Estate is looking to let the tenders for the extension work by the end of October 2016. Work should begin during the winter with a 9month construction period.
- b) **Staffing update** – CNPA are currently recruiting a LEADER Manager following Alice Mayne’s resignation. We are also recruiting a Volunteer (57 applications received).
- c) **Equalities** – We are preparing for our new set of equality Outcomes that are to be published in April 2017. This involves reporting on existing outcomes, identifying new outcomes, analysis of evidence, and consultation with affected groups through Inclusive Cairngorms. Will also involve the development of a Board succession plan, and report on steps we intend taking towards ensuring diversity in relation to the protected characteristics of Members.
- d) **Social Impact Pledge** – Plans are being developed to invite senior phase students from the local high schools to the November or December Planning Committee meeting. We are also promoting volunteering to staff and local community/charitable groups; and are promoting and identifying applicants for small grants through the staff led Social Conscience Group.

Grant Moir September 2016

Board Member Update – Paul Easto

Over the past 3 months there has been solid progress and interesting developments regarding tourism in the Park. The early summer kicked off with a well-attended CBP conference at Mar Lodge in Braemar where delegates gained further insight on VisitScotland’s digital-first promotional strategy alongside the SE/HIE Digital Tourism Scotland (“DTS”) project. Local activity under the DTS banner is being delivered by the Cairngorms Business Partnership (“CBP”) with the objective of improving business’ digital skills and adoption of new technologies. The first series of workshops is underway in Braemar, Tomintoul and Aviemore with the content being tailored to the specific requirements of tourism businesses and destinations in the Park.

Throughout the summer a series of key meetings followed, firstly with VisitScotland and more recently with The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (“CTP”). Myself, Grant and Murray met with Riddell Graham, Director of Partnerships at VisitScotland. The purpose of the meeting was to update on progress of the NPPP and explore ways in which VisitScotland could more pro-actively promote the National Park as a destination. The conversation was productive and enabled a further meeting with Lord Thurso, the new Chair of VisitScotland. As Board Members will be aware, Peter Argyle and Murray met with Lord Thurso in August. I view the ongoing development of a more informed relationship and improved dialogue with VisitScotland as a strategic priority. Through a closer working

relationship we can continue to build awareness of the tourism offer in the Park and help better position the destination as a feature of VisitScotland's domestic and international marketing efforts.

The work of the CTP over the period has continued to focus on development of the Tourism Action Plan. Since the last update, work has been undertaken to synthesise all the historic and existing tourism strategies and action frameworks. This work provided the starting point for a key discussion with the three leading destination groups within the Park (CBP, Visit Aberdeenside and Moray Speyside). The objectives of this recent meeting were to i) identify and share key target markets; ii) confirm areas of common interest and activity and iii) take the first steps in agreeing what should be the key actions for Tourism in the Park for the period to 2020.

The positive outcome to report is that there is a high degree of consistency and agreement on key markets between the three organisations, with recognition that international markets will be key to developing the Park's tourism economy. In terms of key actions, the emerging themes were to a) focus on the promotion of assets which already exist in the Park and b) ensure that work/projects which have been started are seen through to completion e.g. The Deeside Way, Speyside Way. The next stage is to draft an outline of the Tourism Action Plan for discussion and approval by the CTP. This plan (which will also form an important part of the renewal of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism designation) will come to the Board later in the year.

On a final note, the CBP summer BBQ took place last week and the general sentiment was that it has been a strong summer season in the Park. This is backed up by recent visitor data from UK Inbound which suggests that international and domestic tourism is experiencing significant growth in 2016.