
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Sustainable Tourism Strategy: Mid-term Review and Forward Planning

Prepared by: Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer
Gavin Miles, Strategic Policy & Planning Officer

Purpose

To inform the board of the results of an informal midterm review of the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Strategy, and seek a decision on the timescale for re-application for the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Note the key issues arising from the interim review of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, and the intention to bring a further paper to the Board in November on private sector collaborative working and National Park Plan delivery structures.

- b) Approve an approach to EUROPARC for a one year delay in re-application for the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*.

Executive Summary

Following the submission of a Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism to EUROPARC, the Cairngorms National Park was awarded the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas* (ECSTPA) in March 2005. The Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism runs from 2005-2010 and was prepared by The Tourism Company for the CNPA.

The CNPA commissioned Richard Denman of The Tourism Company to undertake an informal interim review of the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism, and the progress made in delivering it, during July 2008. His report forms Annex 1 to this paper and the Board are asked to note his conclusions.

The report also considers the timescale for re-application for the ECSTPA. The standard timescale for application is on a 5-yearly basis, so the next CNP application would be due in March 2010. However there are two strong arguments for applying to EUROPARC for a delay of one year:

- a) To allow the results of the 2009/10 visitor survey to feed into the development of the new Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
 - b) To reduce the gap in timescales between the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the National Park Plan from two years to one. This would allow more co-ordination between the two in terms of development and delivery.
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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY: MID-TERM REVIEW AND FORWARD PLANNING – FOR DECISION

Background

1. Following the submission of a Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism to EUROPARC, the Cairngorms National Park became the first UK National Park to be awarded the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas* in March 2005. The Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism runs from 2005-2010 and was prepared by The Tourism Company for the CNPA, in close association with the then Visitor Services, Information and Tourism (ViSIT) Forum. It has been the basis for sustainable tourism development and management in the Cairngorms and informed much of the development of the Cairngorms National Park Plan.
2. The CNPA commissioned Richard Denman of The Tourism Company to undertake an interim review of the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism, and the progress made in delivering it, during July 2008. The review was based on an assessment of relevant documents, a two-day visit to the National Park to discuss issues with CNPA officers and relevant partners, and telephone interviews with partners unable to meet him in person. The full review report can be found at Annex 1.
3. The objectives of the review were to:
 - a) Assess progress to date in delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy & Action Plan.
 - b) Consider how current policies and structures, particularly relating to the National Park Plan, meet the expectations of the ECSTPA.
 - c) Consider where resources should be focused over the next two years to ensure successful reapplication for ECSTPA.

Key Issues

4. The review report is generally positive. *"The overall conclusion from the review is that CNPA and its partners have made very good progress on the development and management of sustainable tourism in the Cairngorms. We are impressed with what has been achieved."* In particular, Cairngorms Branding, the Panorama display boards, the Cairngorms Explorer, and the Cairngorms on a Shoestring project were highlighted as examples of good practice.
5. Many of the suggested priorities for the next two years relate to specific actions within the Action Plan, and these will form the focus of delivery for officers and partners over the remainder of the 5-year work programme. However the report does draw out some wider issues, which are summarised and addressed below.

6. Partnership working, and particularly a clear mechanism for engaging with the private sector tourism industry, is a key requirement of the ECSTPA. There currently appears to be some confusion amongst partner organisations about the position of tourism within the National Park Plan delivery structures. The report suggests reviewing and clarifying the roles of the various relevant Delivery Teams and Advisory Forums. An ongoing assessment of the National Park Plan delivery structures is underway and will be discussed by the Board in November. This Sustainable Tourism Strategy review report will feed in to that process.
7. The report also suggests closer working between the various private-sector tourism bodies within the CNP area to ensure consistent messages and best use of resources. This issue is being addressed through the current work on a model for collaborative business working across the Park. The Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, along with the Destination Management Organisations and other business interests have commissioned a consultant, Jan Polley, to develop a proposal which will form a basis for consultation and discussion with key stakeholders. This is due by the end of October and will be the subject of a paper to the board in November.

Recommendation

8. **That the Board note the key issues arising from the interim review of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, and the intention to bring a further paper to the Board in November on private sector collaborative working and National Park Plan delivery structures.**

Forward Planning

9. Currently re-application for the ECSTPA is due in March 2010. The application must be in the form of a new Sustainable Tourism Strategy & Action Plan so if this timetable is adhered to, work on this must take place throughout 2009. However, this raises two issues.
10. The development of the current strategy was largely based on information from the CNP Visitor Survey 2003/04. The next Visitor Survey is scheduled to take place from April 2009 until March 2010, with the results available several months afterwards. Comparison of this with the 2003/04 survey report would give valuable information about visitor trends which ideally should feed into the development of the next strategy.
11. The Review Report flags up a certain amount of confusion between the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the National Park Plan. While the

Strategy informed the National Park Plan, and key actions from the Strategy are picked up in the NPP Priorities for Action, the actions are spread between several Priorities for Action and the 5-year delivery timescales for the two are currently two years apart.

12. There is therefore a strong argument that the timescale for re-application for the ECSTPA be delayed. While a delay of two years may be ideal in terms of National Park Plan delivery timescales, it is not expected that this would be acceptable to EUROPARC, and the CNP would be likely to lose the ECSTPA in the meantime. A delay of up to one year is more likely to be acceptable to EUROPARC, and would allow the 09/10 Visitor Survey to inform the development of the next Sustainable Tourism Strategy & Action Plan which could then be submitted to EUROPARC in early 2011. The draft National Park Plan 2012 – 2017 will be developed in 2010 for consultation in 2011 so the two documents could be produced together.

Recommendation

13. **That the Board approve an approach to EUROPARC to request a delay of up to one year in re-application for the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*.**

Consultation

14. The Review Report was based on consultant's discussions with a variety of key partners including the chair of the Enjoying and Understanding Advisory Forum and representatives from Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, Deeside & the Cairngorms DMO, Aviemore & the Cairngorms DMO, Tomintoul & Glenlivet Highland Holiday, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage.
15. The Review Report has been distributed to the Enjoying and Understanding Advisory Forum Meeting which met on Friday 10th October. The Forum had a detailed discussion about the report and it was agreed that there was value in re-applying for the ECSTPA, both for the bottom-up process of developing the strategy and for the increasing value of having a visitor destination that has been externally accredited. They also agreed that a delay of up to one year in re-application, while not ideal, was logical.

Policy Context

16. The development of a well-informed, internationally-accredited Sustainable Tourism Strategy can contribute particularly to the following National Government Outcomes:
 - a) We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
 - b) We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.
 - c) We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
 - d) We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.
 - e) We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.

17. Many of the 46 Corporate Plan achievements originated from the 2005 Sustainable Tourism Strategy, particularly those contained within the *Making Tourism & Business More Sustainable* and *Raising Awareness & Understanding* sections of the Corporate Plan.

Delivering Sustainability

18. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy encourages more sustainable business practices and visitor behaviour within the tourism industry.

Delivering A Park for All

19. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy encourages improvements in quality and welcome for visitors of all ages, abilities and incomes.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

20. Developing the next Sustainable Tourism Strategy alongside the next draft National Park Plan will ensure clearer linkages between the two documents.

Implications

Financial Implications

21. Delaying the development of a new Sustainable Tourism Strategy will not affect the cost of developing the Strategy, but the funding will need to be allocated in the 2010/11 operational plan rather than 2009/10.

Presentational Implications

22. If EUROPARC are content to accept a delay of up to one year, which we believe to be likely, the Cairngorms National Park will retain the ECSTPA for that time and there should be no presentational

implications. However if a delay would cause the temporary loss of the Charter, this would be an issue. If that turns out to be the case, the timescale for re-application would return to the Board for further consideration.

Implications for Stakeholders

23. A wide variety of stakeholders will need to be involved in the development of the next Sustainable Tourism Strategy. By streamlining this with the development of the draft National Park Plan, we will avoid duplication of effort amongst stakeholders, and hopefully reduce consultation fatigue.

Next Steps

24. If the Board are content with the proposal, we shall officially approach EUROPARC to request a delay of up to one year in re-applying for the ECSTPA. If our request is approved, we will proceed as detailed above. If it is rejected, and CNP risks losing the ECSTPA, we will bring the matter back to the Board for further discussion in early 2009.

**Heather Trench
Gavin Miles
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heathertrench@ Cairngorms.co.uk
gavinmiles@ Cairngorms.co.uk