
CAIRNGORMS OUTDOOR ACCESS TRUST

Business Plan 2009-11

Introduction

1. The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust is a company created out of the Upper Deeside Access Trust. The background work in the transition from UDAT to COAT took place during the 2007/8 business year, with members confirmed and the memoranda and articles of association agreed by the end of that financial period. COAT officially started business on 1st April 2008.
2. COAT is a Registered Company Limited by Guarantee, with charitable status. The current members are Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage, Aberdeenshire Council and Balmoral Estate. The company is designed to develop and deliver outdoor access related projects throughout the Cairngorms National Park and surrounding area. The points of reference for COAT activity are the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Core Path Plan, although it is possible for COAT to carry out some work outwith the guidance of these framework documents.
3. The objectives of the Trust are:
 - a) To conserve and protect, for the benefit of the public, the natural heritage and environment of the Area by encouraging, developing and implementing a strategy for the management of access in the Area which integrates the needs of land managers, access users, the local community and the natural heritage
 - b) To facilitate and maintain public access to the Area whilst at the same time encouraging a sensitive and planned approach to recreational use therein and access thereto which is sympathetic to and compatible with the natural heritage of the area
 - c) To advance the education of the general public in the natural heritage of the Area, including but not limited to the flora and fauna and environmental and land management aspects of the Area, and also in the appropriate and sensitive use of and access to the Area
 - d) To promote the public and individual health benefits of the enjoyment of outdoor access within the Area

COAT Structure

Coat Board

4. The governance of the company is provided by a Chairman and Board of Directors. Pat Chalmers is the current chairman and is independent from the members. He has announced that he will step down during this business year, after seven years service to UDAT and to COAT, and a new Chairman will be appointed by the board prior to the commencement of the delivery of this business plan. The Board of Directors currently comprises Peter Ord (Balmoral Estate), David Cameron (CNPA), David Bale (SNH), Cllr Marcus Humphries (Aberdeenshire Council), Cllr Dave Fallows (CNPA). The Board will consider applications for additional directors in the coming months with a view to expanding the Board by up to a further three directors.

Management Group

5. The Management Group provides guidance and assistance on development and delivery of the Business Plan and consists of officers from SNH, CNPA and Aberdeenshire Council, as well as elected Affiliate Members Representatives, one from the East Cairngorms and one from the West Cairngorms. The Board have recently approved the expansion of this to offer one place to a representative of the Cairngorms Local Outdoors Access Forum, with this person still to be confirmed. The group currently comprises Bob Grant (CNPA), Linda Mathieson (Aberdeenshire Council), Debbie Greene (SNH), Robin Blyth (East Cairngorms Affiliate Representative), and Andy Dunn (West Cairngorms Affiliate Representative).

Staff

6. As part of the expansion of the operational area COAT has had to reconfigure staff structure to offer a level of service across park. The East Cairngorms Access Projects Officer remains based in the Deeside office, as does the Trust Administrator (part time). A West Cairngorms Access Projects Officer will be recruited prior to Christmas 2008, and this person will be based in office accommodation in the West Cairngorms. A part time Car Park Attendant is based at Spittal of Glenmuick. The Trust Manager will work between both offices.
7. The business plan is designed to reflect delivery of outdoors access objectives from a fully operational Cairngorms Outdoors Access Trust. The plan assumes two Access Officers in post to cover the East and West Cairngorms respectively, and will likely require additional admin and/or technical staff for the Upland Path project in year 2.

Scope

8. A number of discrete projects are currently being worked up in COAT's first, and transitional, business plan. This has provided a valuable opportunity to test the new funding regime that has come into place in recent years, including the new Rural Development Programme (SRDP), Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) and LEADER + for the Cairngorms National Park and Aberdeenshire Council.
9. The Draft Core Paths plans for the Park and Aberdeenshire have been issued for public consultation and will be complete by the end of the financial year. Upland path priorities will have been set for the wider park area through the workshop to be held later this year. Aspirations on a standards-based approach to signposting, interpretive boards and path leaflets will be developed this winter in consultation with stakeholders park-wide. COAT is therefore in a good position to put in place a second business plan to cover the period 2009 to 2011.
10. The key themes of project to be worked up are:
 - a) *Path Networks Around Communities*
 - b) *Health and Wellbeing*
 - c) *Mountain Path Project*
 - d) *Associated Visitor Infrastructure*
 - e) *Promotion and Marketing of Outdoors Access*
11. The length of the business plan has been set at 2 years, as this fits in well with the current funding rounds of the majority of members and key partner organisations. The timing of the plan will give COAT a good opportunity to fundraise for the majority of the projects work prior to the plan commencing, and the term of the plan will give COAT a good opportunity to develop and deliver a high quantity of project work across the Park with a fully operational staff structure to provide a service across the area.
12. The plan takes a projects based approach, with key multi-partner funded projects that will require external grant to be raised to support that level of work, and as such there will be a certain amount of risk attached to these sources of funding. However the plan reflects aspiration at this time, and it would be hard to imagine COAT failing in many or all of its external grant applications. There is a clear requirement for outdoors access work in the area, an established number of grant awarding bodies who have either funded this type of work in the past or have funding criteria that encompasses outdoors access. As such the plan should be taken forward with a degree of optimism, with a view to creating momentum and driving forward in the development and delivery of outdoor access related projects throughout the park and surrounding area.

13. The plan also allows for maintenance and aftercare on UDAT infrastructure, as well as the developing maintenance liabilities that will accrue as COAT develops and delivers new routes.

Projects

Path Networks Around Communities

14. The Cairngorms National Park and the Aberdeenshire Core Path Plans identify and designate networks of core paths, whereby everyone can enjoy the outdoors responsibly. The vast majority of routes are in the low ground, and located around local communities. Path networks should be available to everyone resident or visiting the Park as a means to experience the outdoors first hand. They need to cater for a wide range of users and should also provide opportunities for those who do not have access to, or would prefer not to use, private motor vehicles. *In this way paths can also contribute to more healthy lifestyles, meet social inclusion objectives and reduce carbon emissions.*
15. The current political emphasis on improving social and health benefits in addition to reducing carbon emissions through reduction in car use means that there may never have been a better time to raise a multi-partner project across the National Park to produce a joined up network of paths around and between communities. The Core Paths should be prioritised this winter for phased working, and a project worked up for the first phase of these prioritised works. The best strategic fit for external grant for this project looks likely to be LEADER and CCF, with a 2 year project to be completed by March 2011 worth £4-600,000, dependent on the levels of external grant raised.
16. COAT has a scheduled programme of maintenance and aftercare works for projects worked up by UDAT between 1998 and 2007. COAT will continue to deliver this key activity and look to roll out similar provision for new paths generated through this project.

Health and Wellbeing

17. The current agenda to improve Scotland's woeful record in public health means that this area of work has much to contribute at the user end of COATs activity. A successful series of Health Walks has been developed in Deeside and Donside, with GPs providing information to patients who they consider may benefit. Specific areas of health have also been targeted, with 'Alzheimers Walks' for instance, developed specifically for people who are suffering from this debilitating condition. There is growing evidence that regular structured exercise can do a great deal to slow down the development of conditions such as this. The review carried out by COAT recently shows that there are tangible mental and physical health benefits to this scheme, which relies overwhelmingly on volunteers.

18. The scheme ought to be continued and worked up to 'best practice' mode so that it can be extended throughout the park, where required, and beyond in the coming years.
 - a) The park area should be evaluated for level of service available and COAT should try to find ways to help plug any gaps that are in evidence by liaising with Health Boards throughout the National Park and surrounding area to encourage active referrals from GPs, and work with partners to develop proposals for health walk schemes where required.
 - b) COAT will expand the range of walks available for specialist health target groups, including groups smoking cessation, weight loss, diabetes, blood pressure and 'Surestep'.

Mountain Path Project

19. The Cairngorm mountains in many ways define all that is best in our countryside. They are places for some of our most famous wildlife, such as deer and eagle. Their landscape qualities offer refreshment and spiritual uplift, access to our mountains contributes significantly to our quality of life, and local economies benefit greatly from the drawing power of our mountains for overseas and home visitors alike. However, accessing the heritage does have a cost. The sensitive natural habitats and landscapes of the mountains are under continuing pressure from visitors. Work is required to ensure that these underpinning features of the National Park are not irrevocably damaged. Sensitive repair and management of damaged areas will secure the resource and minimise the human impact, whilst allowing tourism businesses to develop in a sustainable fashion.
20. The Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy identifies the necessity of a consistent approach across the park in addressing upland path erosion repair, and COAT intends to pioneer a more strategic approach to management of these invaluable heritage assets.
21. Path condition surveys will have been completed by this autumn, based on the routes identified through the Cairngorms Upland Path Priorities Assessment workshop held earlier in the year. A fully prioritised list of upland paths will be brought forward for a multi-partner funded project. External grant should be sought with HLF and ERDF looking the best strategic fit for heritage conservation and sustainable development. A 5 year project gives a reasonable period to develop and deliver, with a good proportion of contract work focussed on the summer months, and a limited specialist contract pool available. The likely value of the project will be in the £2-3m range, dependent on the level of external and partner funding secured.

22. A key part of the long term management will be in securing the aftercare required in terms of provision for long term maintenance and pre-emptive working where required. COAT currently maintains the work carried out by UDAT through the ECAP and other projects between 1998 and 2007. COAT will work with others with a key interest in the area to investigate the possibility of sharing resources with other organisations that have invested heavily in this type of work in the past, particularly The National Trust for Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In the meantime the existing UDAT built infrastructure will be maintained, with a prioritised annual schedule of works to be carried out.

Associated visitor infrastructure

23. Provision of high quality infrastructure – such as car park improvements, countryside furniture, sign-posting and interpretation boards – is a powerful visitor management tool, as has clearly been demonstrated at the Spittal of Glen Muick. There is a good deal of this type of infrastructure across the park, though standards vary markedly. In conjunction with CNPA officers and key stakeholders, COAT will work up generic standards for these areas of work that can be rolled out across the park in future years.

Promotion, marketing and development of business opportunities to generate sustainable economic benefits

24. As the path network across the Park and surrounding area is developed with a strategic overview, it will be important that these are marketed well to visitors and locals alike. This will benefit users, as well as businesses that benefit directly and indirectly from outdoors access by the public. There should be a visible connection between all path network leaflets throughout the park that shows the visitor they are in the National Park, and consistency in minimum standards of information and mapping. In conjunction with Park officers and key stakeholders, COAT will develop generic standards in leaflet design that can be developed throughout the park in future years where demand requires.
25. The website will become dynamic, with a forum and regular updates by all staff. This will provide an iterative and flexible approach to use of the web, and if successful will provide a platform for COAT to regularly update the public on development, to communicate with its diverse range of affiliates and with the wider public, and promote greater public involvement with COAT through the public forum. This will require development of staff IT skills to be fully successful.

Dougie Baird - September 2008

COAT Business Plan 2009-11 (Outline Costs and Income)		2009/10	2010/11	Comment
Income Source				
	CNPA	180,000	185,000	Contribution to COAT Business Plan
	SNH	70,000	65,000	Contribution to Specific Areas of Project Activity
	Aberdeenshire Council	20,000	20,000	Contribution to COAT Business Plan
	COAT Income	35,000	35,000	Contribution to COAT Business Plan
	Highland Council	10,000	10,000	Contribution to COAT Business Plan
	RSPB		10,000	Contribution to Upland Path Project Only
	Highlands and Islands Enterprise		20,000	Contribution to Upland Path Project Only
	Moray Council	10,000	10,000	Contribution to COAT Business Plan
	Angus Council		10,000	Contribution to Upland Path Project Only
	HLF		100,000	Contribution to Upland Path Project Only
	ERDF		100,000	Contribution to Upland Path Project Only
	CCF	100,000	100,000	Contribution to Path Networks Project Only
	LEADER	90,000	90,000	Contribution to Path Networks Project Only
	Total Income	515,000	755,000	
Project Costs				
<i>Area of Activity</i>				
	Path Networks Project	195,000	185,000	Prioritised Path Works Based on CPP, CCF and Leader Funded Project
	Health Walks Programme	25,000	35,000	Existing Deeside programme plus evaluation of opportunities park wide
	Pan-Cairngorms Upland Path Project	16,500	230,922	Year 1 pre-project costs, Year 2 commencement of 5yr Upland Project
	Associated visitor infrastructure	35,000	17,000	Interpretive Boards and Signposting
	Promotion, marketing and development	35,000	24,000	Web Development and Leaflets

Maintain Upland paths	17,000	17,000	<i>Prioritised programme of works</i>
Maintain Lowland Paths	15,000	15,500	<i>Prioritised maintenance programme</i>
<i>Programme Subtotal</i>	<i>338,500</i>	<i>524,422</i>	
Running Costs			
<i>Staff</i>			
Trust Manager Salary	44,811	46,379	<i>ERNIC @ 10.45 %, Cost of Living inc @ 3.5% + Superannuation</i>
Manager Travel and Subsistence	5,400	5,800	<i>Based on ECBU plus 10,000 miles at 45 and 48p per mile respectively</i>
2 FTE Access Officers	61,196	65,626	<i>2 FTE posts ERNIC @ 10.45 %, Cost of Living inc @ 3.5% + Superannuation</i>
Access Officer Travel and Subsistence	6,100	6,510	<i>Based on ECBU plus 6,000 miles per access officer py at 45 and 48p per mile respectively</i>
Trust Administrator	17,605	18,221	<i>0.6 FTE post ERNIC @ 10.45 %, Cost of Living inc @ 3.5% + Superannuation</i>
Travel and Subsistence	1,050	1,110	<i>Based on ECBU plus 2,000 miles py at 45 and 48p per mile respectively</i>
Upland Path Project Officer		32,438	<i>Based on ECBU plus 6,000 miles per access officer py at 45 and 48p per mile respectively</i>
Upland Path Project Admin		11,317	<i>0.5 FTE post ERNIC @ 10.45 %, Cost of Living inc @ 3.5% + Superannuation</i>
Travel and Subsistence		630	<i>Based on ECBU plus 1,000 miles py at 45 and 48p per mile respectively</i>
Car Park attendant	2,800	3,000	<i>Estimate</i>
Staff Training	1,000	1,000	<i>Estimate</i>
Protective Clothing	800	800	<i>Estimate</i>
<i>Total Staff Costs</i>	<i>140,762</i>	<i>192,831</i>	
<i>Premises and Equipment</i>			
Office premises and oncosts	25,351	27,000	<i>Estimate based on current costs plus projected rise in costs</i>
Professional services	5,387	5,447	
Car park rental	5,000	5,300	
<i>Organisation subtotal</i>	<i>35,738</i>	<i>37,747</i>	

<i>Total Running Costs</i>	<i>176,500</i>	<i>230,578</i>
Total Costs	515,000	755,000