
CAIRNGORMS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

- Title:** Voluntary payback schemes
- Prepared by:** Murray Ferguson, Sustainable Rural Development Director
- Purpose:** To prompt discussion around the principles and process involved in development of a scheme generation of funds for investment in the National Park.
- Advice Sought:** The Forum is asked to advise the CNPA on:-
1. Is there broad support for preparation of a scheme that generates funds for investment in the National Park?
 2. The options as set out in the CBP paper (see para. 5)
 3. What principles should be considered in formulating any scheme (see para. 6)?

Background

1. There was discussion at the Sustainable Tourism Forum in January 2012 on the work of Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) and how to generate more funds from non public sector sources to invest in the Park. It was agreed that Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) should work together with COAT and others and report back on options for way forwards.
2. CBP prepared a review paper in August 2012 to summarise what has happened since the voluntary payback scheme report was commissioned (in 2009) with options for implementation. This was circulated to STF members earlier but is also attached to meeting papers.
3. In the meantime, and led by a related line of thinking associated with generation of funds for investment in the Park, a paper was taken to the CNPA Board paper on a proposed "Common Good Fund" (Sept 2012). See paper 5 at <http://cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/about-us/meeting-papers/board-papers/?meetingID=773> The Board agreed to the recommendations and noted that further consultation and discussion was needed with interested parties. Following consideration by Finance Committee a further paper should brought back to the CNPA Board with a firm proposal. In the meantime interim arrangements should be set up to hold any receipts of donations made.

Recent progress

4. Earlier in October CNPA brought together Chairman and Chief Executive of COAT and CBP (plus Debbie Strang, CBP Board member) to explore these issues and to identify a way forwards. A number of issues arose including:
 - The excellent track records of CBP and COAT – notably in developing business collaboration and in delivering projects that people visiting the Park cared about – and the need for the organisations to work well together. If any scheme is to be taken forwards, they should both play significant role.
 - Cairngorms Nature (a partnership based on biodiversity conservation and enhancement) is just getting off the ground and may be suitable recipient of funds in due course from any Park-wide scheme that is developed. They too should be involved in discussions about a proposed scheme.
 - There was an issue about whether to frame any scheme around Visitor Payback or more widely. A degree of judgement was required about where funds were likely to be generated from – current CNPA thinking was that there was scope for a scheme that was more widely based than just visitors, including, for example, legacies and corporate donations.
 - We need good level of information about the value of the recreational and environmental resource of the Park and the degree to which it supports and develops the local economy. We already have some information through visitor survey, economic baseline study and business barometer but more focussed work is needed in due course.
 - There were many good schemes in the Park, mostly localised or specific to particular organisations, to generate funds and reinvest them locally. There was some risk that a larger, more strategic scheme could be seen as competition for same scarce resource. With careful management there was a feeling that there should be room for both local and Park-wide schemes.
 - One significant benefit of the sort of larger scheme under consideration is match-funding or leverage benefits – as evidenced by COAT who have made excellent use of the modest funds from one car-park in the Park as basis to generate substantial sums for path maintenance and other work.
 - Previous work, following the 2009 study, had been shelved largely due to economic crisis. Similar pressures on businesses applied today. However, public resources for investment in the Park were dwindling and were not likely to increase in near future yet demands for investment in the resource continue to grow. It is challenging to see where best to break into the cycle – it was put forwards that if we are going to do something we need to start work now, develop momentum and get infrastructure and administration in place.
 - UK Visitor Payback issues: These issues were being discussed at UK level with a notable two day conference in Lake District in October. Alan Rankin from CBP attended the event.

Options for a way forwards

5. The CBP paper sets out the following broad options:

Continue to Promote Existing Initiatives

Recognise and continue to support and promote existing initiatives (GBA pin badges, and Explore Abernethy etc) more widely within the Park area so that they may be replicated elsewhere.

Confirm Enthusiasm and Commitment for a Cairngorms VPS by Key Partners

This is an extremely complex project and the key partners need to consider the report and ascertain whether the enthusiasm and commitment exists to pursue the establishment of a Cairngorms-wide VPS. It will be important that one of the partners is willing to be a 'champion' for the project and convene a small working group (hopefully with secretariat support from the CNPA) to consider the following:

- Clarify the objectives of the Cairngorms VPS
- Identify potential grant sources and who will take each the lead on sourcing grant funding (elsewhere this has been provided by the National Park Authority, Leader, HIE, SE, SNH, Local Authorities etc)
- Consider the governance of the scheme
- Consider whether COAT could be the key beneficiary from a Cairngorms VPS, and how this might sit with the requirement to fund other local projects at the same time.

If there is insufficient support by key partners at this time, it is suggested that the project is not taken forward, and perhaps reviewed again in a few years time.

6. For the purposes of promoting discussion is proposed that any scheme that is taken forwards should:

- Have broad support from the business community, people who live and work in the Park and the principal Park-wide initiatives that care for the Park (notably COAT and Cairngorms Nature).
- Build on the experience of the existing schemes within the Park that encourage investment in caring for the area so that the overall level of return is maximised.
- Consider the issue holistically so that there are explicit and transparent connections between all stages of the process – from marketing the scheme through how the funds are spent on the ground.
- Produce funds to support practical and highly visible projects that conserve/enhance the environment and/or improve the visitor experience.
- Have the minimum possible administrative costs and make maximum possible use of existing organisational structures to raise funds and deliver projects.
- Be available Park-wide and be very clearly linked to the Cairngorms National Park and make use of the agreed brand and marketing messages.
- Provide high profile and regular feedback on use of funds in ways that are clearly visible to local businesses, visitors and supporters.

Next steps

7. Subject to advice received from the Forum the next steps would be:
 - Further discussion with key parties interested in the topic, including STF;
 - CNPA to convene further meeting of CBP/ COAT/Cairngorms Nature with view to developing proposals to take back to CNPA Finance Committee and then, at the appropriate time, the CNPA Board.

Murray Ferguson

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murrayferguson@cairngorms.co.uk