

Annex I: Summary of summer engagement programme on the Economic Action Plan

1. Background

To support the consultation the CNPA Convener and Deputy Convener spent seven days out in the Park, meeting and visiting businesses along with locally elected members and senior staff. The visits focused on the main settlements and included Newtonmore, Kingussie, Aviemore, Grantown, Tomintoul, Braemar and Ballater. In total, members met directly with over 45 businesses including several significant employers (e.g. Cairngorms Brewery, McGowan's, Wilderness Scotland, Russwoods, Fife Arms Hotel, Hilton, and Highland Wildlife Park) and with managers and front-line staff in many small shops and premises.

2. Summary of what was heard

Overall, the issues were not identical across the Park and the emphasis of conversations was distinct in different locations and business sectors. However, common themes included:

- a) Availability of housing for workers
- b) Transport challenges – especially related to staff on shift work in a tourism economy
- c) Business Rates
- d) Winter economy – the challenges of keeping workers employed in winter period
- e) Ski centres – fragility; need for investment and diversification; equity of approach
- f) Town Centres – changing shopping habits, the popularity of small independent shops with visitors
- g) Land rents and the degree of control by limited number of people in some areas
- h) The challenges of securing commercial lending and investment
- i) Attracting and retaining staff
- j) Changing expectations of young people about work and lifestyle
- k) Brexit – especially the potential implications of securing staff for visitor economy and small businesses
- l) Training and skills – ongoing need for investment
- m) Digital connectivity – especially an issue in the more rural parts of the Park but, even close to settlements, connectivity could be very poor
- n) Maintenance of infrastructure, especially in visitor economy – and especially toilets!
- o) The importance of young people – many employers had already taken steps to encourage and develop young people and were willing to do more
- p) The challenge of delivering projects due to complex processes – businesses need investment, leadership and simple consents regimes
- q) The need for collaboration at village/town scale and the challenges/ opportunities for Business Association
- r) Business support – very mixed service and not much there for very small scale and start-ups
- s) Encouraging visitors passing by to stop and spend time and money