

SCOTLAND'S RURAL WAY OF LIFE

Empowering communities so they can thrive

Nature and people can thrive together in the Cairngorms National Park. Around 17,000 people live in 23 rural communities across 5 local authorities, spread across a massive 4,500km², which makes this the largest Park in the UK - more than double the size of the Lake District. Wonderful as it is to have nature on your doorstep, people face many challenges and, over the past 10 years, communities, the Park

What's happening?

- The National Park contributes £400 million a year to the Scottish economy
- 1,000 jobs created between 2003 and 2010
- Youth unemployment is reducing through projects eg Land Management Training Project, and Cairngorms Construction Skills
- 80% reduction in unemployment from 1,000 in 2003 to 200 in 2010
- 250 affordable houses built across the Park
- Over £6m invested in 10 years into projects for communities via LEADER and match-funding; £5.25 million for land-based businesses
- CNPA provides Community Development Officers and Trusts, LEADER projects and other community-led initiatives

self-sustaining future. And these plans are starting to become reality thanks to a £2.5 million investment over the next 5 years supporting 250 projects. Here, in a snapshot of what's taking place across the Park, three people talk about how they've been empowered in the last decade.

"It's about getting things done in the communities and working together for the good of the people and the Park."

"Strengthening Communities' delivers training and networking opportunities for communities in Badenoch and Strathspey. Being part of the National Park has made a huge difference to its communities. Without it, everything that goes on would be ad hoc and less consistent, especially with local authority cutbacks. One example is encouraging villages to see themselves as team towns, Team Kingussie, Team Aviemore and so on, made up of all sorts of locals such as mums and



tots groups, walking and bowling groups, councillors, the village hall etc and they work together to shape their village and share ideas and projects across the communities. The project strengthens villages as small economies with practical training in finance, business planning and so on. I'd say we're very lucky to be part of a National Park."

Karen Derrick,
Manager for Strengthening Communities

"People are gradually realising that being in a National Park is a huge asset, with great support for our work on the ground"

"It's a privilege to be in a National Park. Our Association of Cairngorm Communities is the only group that brings everyone together - very

important for those who'd otherwise be quite isolated. We meet around four times a year to discuss issues affecting us such as bidding for broadband Internet. We hear each other's stories and see if one community can use a model or approach that has worked well for another. We chair the Planning Reps Network, developing communication and trust and enabling communities to feed into planning decisions earlier in the process. We also run 'lessons learned' sessions. All this is really important and a huge change, as planning is such a sensitive topic for people living here."

Roger Clegg, Chair of the Association of Cairngorms Communities

"I went from being out of work, to working freelance with a chainsaw to now running a Ltd company, Highland Forestry, currently employing 12 people."

"I moved into the area as a youngster and joined the Cairngorms Action for Training Scheme as I needed to put a roof over my head and food on the table. I learned many skills and then received further training via the Land-based Business Training Programme. I worked self-employed and then three years ago decided to launch Highland Forestry. We do everything from conservation work to commercial forestry for corporate and domestic clients. The business is doing well."

Matthew O'Brian, Highland Forestry



Authority and partners have been working together to respond to challenges and create opportunities. Now we're entering a new phase of action.

So what challenges do people face, and what makes rural economies more fragile? More expensive housing; higher and ever-rising food and fuel costs; patchy broadband internet access; limited public services; less public transport; fewer job vacancies - many under the minimum wage. Local people have to do more for themselves - as they've done for thousands of years. Since becoming a National Park, over 80% of villages have completed community action plans, each with a pragmatic vision for a

