



Cairngorms National Park Authority Economic Action Plan 2019 – 2022 Consultation

Response by  on behalf of
Alvie & Dalraddy Estates
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1. Are there other significant economic trends, challenges, opportunities or data sources that we should be taking into account in developing this Economic Action Plan

The economic and cultural heritage of the Park has been based on farming, forestry, field sports and tourism. The dominance of tourism in this Economic Action Plan consultation is of particular concern along with the lack of consideration for farming, field sports, forest production, renewable energy, quarrying and processing of locally produced products. In our view the dominance and increase in visitor numbers is already adversely impacting on the natural and cultural heritage of the Cairngorms National Park.

The following should be taken into account in the Economic Action Plan.

Hill Farming

Hill farming in less favoured areas such as the Cairngorms National Park is economically marginal and under threat from a predicted reduction in support and the impact of Brexit. In Scotland, particularly in less favoured areas, cattle and sheep numbers are in decline and have been for some time. The predicted reduction in support combined with a loss of markets in Europe is likely to accelerate the decline in hill farming and have a significant impact on land use within the Park. A transfer of marginal farmland to forestry

could have an adverse impact on employment. Replacing hill farming with large-scale forestry will reduce the diversity of habitats and our landscape.

Woodland Expansion

Expanding woodland cover will not necessarily provide more jobs. If woodland expansion is carried out at the expense of another economic activity and the woodland is then not harvested, this can adversely affect our rural economy and employment. Woodland expansion should be linked to improving the economic viability and employment in our rural areas.

Field Sports

Field sports (hunting, shooting, fishing, falconry), also known as Country sports is in decline with reduction culls in deer, a decline in salmon numbers and adverse weather conditions adversely affecting grouse shooting. Field sports attracts relatively high spending visitors that are attracted to the Park outside the peak tourist season. Field sports provide employment and income; it attracts investment in our more remote and agriculturally challenged rural areas.

The demand for venison in the UK currently exceeds our ability to supply. Wild deer provide an organically produced lean meat that is not subsidised. Active management of our habitats and wildlife by gamekeepers has helped create the environment where a wide variety of species, including ground nesting birds have thrived. Management of our moorland areas has reduced the risk of wildfires. Field sports funds management of our wildlife and moorland habitats. Field sports remain an important part of our rural economy this should be recognised. The impact on employment, investment and wildlife by changes in field sports should be monitored.

Tourism

Visitor numbers have increased by around 23% over the last 10 years despite the impact of less snow on snow sports and the decline in field sports. In 2003 when the Cairngorms National Park was designated, 1.3 million visits to the Park were recorded. In 2017 1.85 million visits were recorded, an increase of 42%. 2018 saw a further significant increase in visitor numbers over 2017. The increasing number of visitors is having an adverse impact on our environment including disturbance to wildlife, water abstraction, erosion, demand for 2nd homes and visitor accommodation plus infrastructure facilities. The damage done to the environment can be directly proportional to the number of people we put through our natural environment. If we wish to sustain and grow our tourist economy whilst minimising the adverse impact on our natural and cultural heritage we need to encourage higher spending visitors and visitors who are attracted to the area outside peak visitor seasons.

Looking to the future the Cairngorms National Park is predicted to have a population increase of 7% between 2020 and 2030 with a growing proportion of the population of pensionable age and a declining number of economically active residents. If visitor numbers continue to increase there will be a declining number of residents available to service these visitors. This could have an adverse impact on the experience of visitors to the Park.

Tourism and its impact is unevenly spread throughout the Cairngorms National Park. It is concentrated around a number of “honeypot” areas. The Cairngorms National Park attracts around 1.5 million visits per year; around 1 million visits are to Aviemore, the Glenmore corridor and Cairngorm Mountain. This concentration of visits provides both a challenge and opportunities.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has also created both opportunities and challenges. Some wild camping and access has resulted in litter, campfires, environmental disturbance and damage that should be addressed. In localities where there are camping, toilet, litter facilities and parking provided, wild camping and inappropriate parking should be discouraged.

Making Use of our Natural Resources

It is important if we wish to maintain and sustain a diverse and healthy rural economy we ensure that our core rural land uses remain economically viable. It is also important that we take advantage of our natural resources to provide the goods and service that we consume. This includes food production, forest products, renewable energy and mineral abstraction. There is no point in having access to a highly skilled workforce if our economy cannot provide the economic activities to employ and support this workforce. Our workforce need practical training in the skills that our industries require.

Renewable Energy

Rural and remote areas in the Cairngorms National Park are well placed to contribute to renewable energy from wind, water and biomass. If we believe we have a climate emergency, this opportunity should not be missed to make the Park and Scotland more self-sufficient or even an exporter of renewable energy.

Renewable energy projects can help fund infrastructure such as roads that can create opportunities for other economic activities in our more remote areas. Renewable energy provides an opportunity to diversify from the dominance of tourism. It can help offset the decline in employment in our more remote rural areas. At the moment there is a presumption against large and medium scale renewable energy production both within and in sight of the Cairngorms National Park. This adversely affects renewable energy production over an area equivalent to 15% of Scotland’s land area.

Rewilding

Almost all of our land has been managed and modified for over 2,000 years to help provide the goods and services we desire or require. Rewilding (recreating someone’s romantic vision of a landscape before the influence of man) will not create more long-term economically viable jobs than those that it destroys. It will not produce the goods and services we require and consume. It will not generate taxes required to fund public sector expenditure such as the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Recycling

The increased population within the Cairngorms National Park combined with increasing visitor numbers produce waste that can and should be recycled locally within the Park. This can create employment and reduce waste that goes to landfill or is exported outside the Park.

Flood Management and Mitigation

The most productive farmland in Badenoch & Strathspey has been the low-lying haugh lands reclaimed from wetlands along the River Spey and its tributaries. Flood banks and associated measures to manage water and the rivers have been built up since the 18th century to manage high water levels, provide productive farmland, renewable energy and diversified habitats. More recently, much of this flood alleviation infrastructure and associated management has been allowed to deteriorate. There is both a challenge and an opportunity to manage this infrastructure for the benefit of the local community and economy given the constraints and bureaucracy now associated with riparian management. We should plan for anticipated changes in climate including increased frequency and intensity of flood events.

The Spey dam at Laggan is an important contributor to flood management on the River Spey. There can be a symbiotic relationship between hydro-schemes and flood management.

Affordable Housing

A consequence of promoting a growth in tourism is a lack of affordable houses for residents.

For those without access to capital, the most affordable housing is rented accommodation. Most domestic accommodation to rent in our rural areas is privately owned. Taxation and recent legislation have combined to discourage the private rented sector from providing more domestic accommodation to rent. Private sector houses previously rented under Short Assured Tenancies are being sold off for second homes or homes for retirement, refurbished as holiday homes, converted to other uses or retained as tied accommodation for key staff. This reduction in private long-term rented accommodation can and should be reversed through legislation.

House prices have risen higher than the national average as a result of the Cairngorms National Park being promoted as a desirable place to live in, retire to, commute from, holiday in and have a second home. Taxation and legislation has restricted the availability of private sector houses to rent. Building more houses that are subsequently sold on as holiday homes or for people to retire into the area compromises our environment and our rural economy. The solution is to diversify the economy away from tourism and change legislation such that property owners are encouraged, not discouraged from providing more houses to rent to residents and people working locally.

Snow Sports

Snow sports extended the tourist season to provide year round tourism. These ski centres were key to the development of year round tourism in Badenoch & Strathspey and the Cairngorms. The ski centres were developed and expanded successfully by local community and private sector investment and management supported by the public sector. Cairngorm Mountain is an example where public sector management and administration has failed. The management of Cairngorm Mountain should be returned to the private sector in the local community.

The economic success of Badenoch & Strathspey was based on being able to provide all year round tourism that in turn provided year round employment. Our experience was that between 1970 and 1990 winter tourism was more lucrative than summer tourism. It is of concern that some hotels such as the Carrbridge

hotel are now considering closing for a period in the winter. This suggests that the growth in tourism has been primarily during the summer season rather than spreading the impact of tourism throughout the year. In the 50 years to 2003 we worked hard and succeeded in providing year round tourism. Has growth in tourism since then recreated a seasonal industry?

Diversifying our Economy

Tourism will continue to dominate the Park's rural economy whilst the Cairngorms National Park Authority continues to promote the area primarily as a nice place to have a holiday and invest in a holiday home. The Cairngorms National Park Authority should invest more in supporting and value adding farming and forestry products. It should encourage investment in renewable energy and utilising our natural resources such as minerals, farm and forest products and wild game. Further investment in tourism should be directed at extending the tourist season and increasing the spend per visitor rather than just increasing visitor numbers.

Demographic Changes

Prior to the Cairngorms National Park designation there was a perception that Badenoch & Strathspey attracted young active residents, many working in outdoor recreational activities. In 2019 the situation has changed with an anticipated increase in the proportion of residents of retirement age. Part of the reason for this trend is a lack of affordable homes to rent that are required by a young, active and mobile workforce. Promoting the area as a nice place to live in has attracted people into this area who are retired.

Catering for our aging population provides opportunities in developing better care in our communities and providing more care homes and facilities for the elderly and end of life. There will also be a higher proportion of our population dependent on the economic activities, income and taxes generated by fewer economically active residents. In addition to an increase in our dependent population, there will be a declining number of taxpayers to maintain our public sector services. Maintaining our current standard of living and welfare provisions will be a challenge.

Conflicts between Conservation, Economic and Social Progress

Our land use and habitats have evolved as a result of active management to provide farm and forest products plus field sports. More recently there has been a trend towards preservation and conservation of specific habitats and species with less consideration for providing goods and services or meeting the requirement of residents. Conflicts have arisen between residents and local businesses and attempts to conserve species such as capercaillie. Some planning consents have taken too long or become so restrictive that business investment has moved elsewhere. There is a danger of turning what was an active and dynamic diverse growing economy into a moribund museum dominated by tourism and the public sector.

Public Sector in Competition with the Private Sector

Whilst public sector financial support is generally welcomed, there are situations where public sector investment and powers have been used to set up or develop businesses in competition with the private sector. How can private sector museums compete against the Highland Folk Park who provide this attraction free, funded by our taxes? How can private sector outdoor centres compete against Glenmore Lodge or

Lagganlia? There are situations where public sector investment or investment by organisations with favourable taxation status has resulted in competing private sector enterprises having to change course, move elsewhere or go out of business.

There are locations within the Cairngorms National Park where facilities such as public toilets, parking, overnight camping facilities, visitor information and retail outlets are lacking. There are opportunities for the public sector to combine with local businesses to provide some of the infrastructure facilities required. There are locations where it would be more cost effective for the public sector to contribute to the cost of a local business providing toilets or parking available to the public rather than the public sector providing these facilities themselves.

Data Sources and Monitoring

The Cairngorms National Park contains honeypot communities such as Aviemore where demand exceeds supply and other areas where the population and the employment that sustains the local community is in decline. Lumping demographic, social, economic and infrastructure trends together across the whole Park hides huge anomalies between different communities within the Park.

The supply and demand for affordable housing, domestic accommodation for rent and elderly care should be monitored split by communities.

Supply and demand along with movements over time and geographically in the working population within the Park should be monitored.

Understanding the needs of the Communities and addressing these needs

Prior to the Cairngorms National Park designation in 2003, in 1991 and 1992 the Cairngorms Working Party spent 2 years talking to businesses, land managers, pressure groups, community representatives and residents within the suggested area of a Cairngorms National Park to understand the aspirations, expectations and challenges facing these rural communities and their economy. Their conclusion was that a National Park designation was inappropriate.

Following the Cairngorms National Park designation there have been numerous consultations on various aspects of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's strategies, policies, our economy and environment. Initially business representatives, property owners and residents responded, hoping that the Cairngorms National Park Authority's would reflect their aspirations, understand their concerns and address their needs. More recently, there is a growing perception that the Cairngorms National Park Authority strategies and plans do not reflect the concerns, needs or aspirations of those who live or work within the Park. For this latest consultation, the response from several members of Scottish Land & Estates managing landholdings within the Park was there was no point in meeting to coordinate a response as the Cairngorms National Park Authority had ignored their previous responses to consultations. Owners of one landholding within the Cairngorms National Park has discouraged their representative from responding to these consultations for the same reason. At a recent meeting of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, one member complained the Cairngorms National Park Authority did not listen; another member queried what the Cairngorms National Park Authority actually did.

There appears to be concern among businesses, managers and residents within the Cairngorms National Park that the Cairngorms National Park Authority does not represent the interests and aspirations of residents or businesses within the Park. It is out of touch and an impediment to the future development of our economy rather than an asset. It is a further tier of unnecessary government bureaucracy. Have we misunderstood the role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority? Should the Cairngorms National Park Authority reflect the aspirations, expectations and needs of the communities and businesses within the Cairngorms National Park or is their role to impose the wishes of central government? If a growing number of representatives of the communities and businesses within the Cairngorms National Park no longer consider it worthwhile to respond to these consultations, is there any point in continuing with these consultations? Is our time better spent engaging with our Local Authority or MSPs?

How can the Cairngorms National Park Authority support and promote sustainable development if a growing proportion of local businesses give up engaging with them or responding to their consultations?

2. Do you support these Actions to deliver the economic strategy as set out in the Cairngorms National Park plan?

No. We should build on the economic strengths of the park but not to the extent of promoting tourism to the detriment of other economic activities and tourism itself. Visitors are attracted to a rural area for recreation, wildlife, seclusion, exclusivity and a wilderness experience. The more visitors you put in a rural area the less each one will be satisfied. It is possible to overstock a field with sheep and cattle to the detriment of their wellbeing. We are in danger of overstocking this area with visitors at certain times of the year to the detriment of their experience and our natural and cultural heritage. We should not follow the Costa del Sol in attracting visitor numbers to the extent that their experience is devalued and visitors pay less.

Tourism

Tourism tends to provide a low wage economy. This can be partially offset by attracting higher spending visitors and visitors coming outside the peak tourist seasons. For example grouse shooters, deer stalkers, anglers and snow sports. The Cairngorms National Park Authority should not measure success by comparing visitor numbers or government investment. Success should be a sustainable rural economy that is generating sufficient surplus income to reinvest in our economy without continued government support.

Forestry

Forestry in the Cairngorms National Park takes around 80 years to reach maturity. On more marginal land it can take longer. To build on our economic strengths tree planting should be in areas and with species that will produce forest products capable of being harvested and utilised, thereby contributing to the resources we require and consume. Investment in forestry should provide an economic and environmental return. Investment in forestry should include investment in harvesting, access roads, processing and value adding of forest products including biomass, sawmills, joinery and fencing.

Trees should only be planted where and when there will be a net increase in employment and economic activity over the existing land use. Where possible woodland expansion should be integrated with other land uses including farming, field sports and tourism.

Diversifying our Economy

Rural development should include diversification other than tourism such as in renewable energy production, quarrying and value adding local produce.

Tourism provides the opportunity of a local market for local produce such as food. Investment is required in value adding and processing of locally produced food such as lamb, beef and venison.

Housing

The Scottish Government and the Cairngorms National Park Authority should encourage rather than discourage the private sector to provide more domestic accommodation to let to residents. The Scottish Government should incentivise the private sector to refurbish and rent out existing houses to residents or build new houses to rent on land they own, rather than incentivise property owners through taxation and regulation to refurbish them as holiday homes, sell them off as holiday or retirement homes or destroy them as domestic accommodation.

Training

Investment in infrastructure should also include, safeguard and promote other economic activities than tourism. It should include adequate access, facilities and training for forestry, renewable energy production, processing and value adding products produced locally.

Demographics

Facilities including care homes, local hospitals and care in the community are already inadequate. Replacing Ian Charles hospital in Grantown and St. Vincents hospital in Kingussie with a community hospital in Aviemore will approximately halve hospital beds available in Badenoch & Strathspey. This is at a time when the population is ageing and the number of residents over 75 years of age is forecast to increase by 97% over the next 20 years. Care in the Community is failing in part due to the shortage of affordable houses to rent for care workers. The current situation is unsustainable and anticipated to deteriorate further.

3. Are these delivery and monitoring arrangements appropriate for the Economic Action Plan?

Delivery of the action plan should involve those who own and invest in our economy along with those who manage and can represent the economic activities on which the Action Plan depends. There is currently a lack of trust in the motivation and competence of both the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. There is a perception that they do not listen to local residents or businesses. The Economic Steering Group should include and listen to representatives from businesses and industries that make up our local economy. A number of local enterprises and residents feel alienated and ignored.

Monitoring the success or failure of our economic assets should involve far more than monitoring visitor numbers.