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| Agenda Item | 3. |
| Report No | BSAC/10/19 |

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee**

Date: **19 August 2019**

Report Title: **Cairngorms National Park Economic Action Plan 2019-2022**

Report By: **Director of Development and Infrastructure.**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) is currently consulting on their new Economic Action Plan for 2019 – 2022. This paper summarises the main elements of the consultation document.
- 1.2 A representative from the National Park Authority will be in attendance to make a presentation to the Area Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Consider the draft responses to the questions, detailed in section 5 of this paper, and to approve the Badenoch and Strathspey Area submission to the Cairngorm National Park Economic Action Plan.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – There are no resource implications arising from this report
- 3.2 Legal – No Implications
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – The development of a new Economic Action Plan for the Cairngorm National Park Authority area will help with the Council's aims and objectives for the continued economic development of Badenoch and Strathspey and the rural areas of the Highlands.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – The CNPA Economic Action Plan consultation document recognises the importance of the implications for the area from climate change. As a result the National Park has committed itself to the need to ensure that growth in the Park economy is sustainable and is focussed on the requirement to meet the target of net zero emissions and of reducing biodiversity targets.
- 2.5 Risk – No Risk Implications
- 2.6 Gaelic – The Celtic Media Festival recently held its annual festival in Aviemore bringing a welcome economic boost to the economy of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) has launched a public consultation process to inform their Economic Action Plan 2019-2022. The consultation process runs until the 20th of September. The Economic Action Plan is one of the key elements in the National Park's Partnership Plan.
- 4.2 The document sets its aim for the future economic vision of the park area firmly within a national context. It highlights the importance the Scottish Government places on the importance of the rural economy to the overall wellbeing of the Scottish Economy. At the same time the consultation recognises the importance of other initiatives within its area, for example the Cairngorm Tourism Action Plan, the Forestry Strategy and the Community Planning processes delivered within each Local Authority area. It takes into account the city region deals across its geography, including the City Region Deal for Inverness and the Highlands.
- 4.3 The Park's four aims underline the importance of the economic element of its activities. By promoting the sustainable use of the area's natural resources, encouraging understanding and enjoyment of the area, and promoting the sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities, the park authority will conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

5. Consultation Questions

- 5.1 The document poses a series of questions related to the various themes they have outlined as the basis for the updated action plan. Prior to setting out the new themes the consultation document reviews, in the "Changes in Strategic Context" section the key factors of the initial economic action plan and asks;

Question 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?

Suggested response; The original themes remain key elements of the new plan and are contained in the new priority themes that have been developed to structure the new Economic Action Plan. Brexit remains an unknown factor, with the potential to present serious implications for the economic wellbeing of the area. Tourism continues to dominate the local economy and is significantly dependent on non UK labour. There is also a major risk to upland farming from Brexit if WTO rules are implemented. 45% tariffs will result on all sheep meat exports to the EU and similarly for beef exports. The high nature conservation value of agriculture is crucial to the Park and could be detrimental to its long-term sustainability should these activities become uneconomic. Many projects supporting business and community development have been dependent

on EU funding support, and there is no clarity on what form the “Shared Prosperity Fund” being developed by the UK Government will take.

Five priority themes have been identified that are aimed at delivering a long term outcome for rural development that ensures a sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities.

Question 2; Do you support these Actions to deliver the economic strategy as set out in the Cairngorm National Park Partnership Strategy?

Suggested response; We would agree with the suggested actions in Priority theme 1 “Building on economic strengths of the Park”. The Council has been identified as a partner in the action around the development of a long-term masterplan and investment package for Cairngorm Mountain. The future of the Cairngorm Mountain Ski uplift facilities are crucial to the long-term economic sustainability of the whole Park area and the Council is very supportive of work being undertaken in partnership to ensure a viable way forward is found. To date we have supported the activities of the HIE led response group charged with mitigating the impact upon the community from the closure of the Funicular railway. The Council’s Business Gateway Service has provided a range of advice and assistance to SMEs in the area and we remain committed to doing what we can, in partnership with the other stakeholders, to ensuring that the facility is operational as soon as possible.

Priority theme 2 looks at “supporting and attracting businesses”. The Council is included in the “Supporting business” action. The Business Gateway Service is able to help all sectors with advice and support. This includes community led businesses as well as social enterprises. The attraction of talent and investment is also an area of activity where the Council, as a member of the CoHI talent attraction group, can add value to the activities outlined in the action plan. As part of the Highland Economic Forum’s activity we are currently re-aligning the focus of the Enterprising Highland website towards talent attraction, while continuing to promote investment opportunities across the Highlands.

While not explicitly mentioned in a number of the priority themes the Council has a key role to play in assisting the lead organisations identified. For example, the concept of developing Rural Development Frameworks is one that the Council’s expertise in land use planning, business development and housing policy can play an important part in helping to realise the plan’s priorities. Similarly, the Council’s educational authority role, in part of the Park’s area must be utilised in terms of priority theme 3, Education, training and skills development, we work closely with Skills Development Scotland in the development of regional Skills Investment Plans.

In terms of digital connectivity, the Council is actively lobbying for the delivery of superfast broadband services/enhanced mobile connectivity across the Council area, including in the Park Authority area. It is expected that R100, the Scottish Government’s commitment to 100% digital coverage by 2021 and also City Deal interventions will further enhance digital connectivity in the Park Authority area.

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

Suggested response; The monitoring arrangements seem appropriate, it is important that all the stakeholders are involved in the delivery and monitoring the economic action plan. We therefore welcome the inclusion of the Council on the Cairngorms

Economic Steering Group, and also the commitment to working with the business community across the area. The specific commitment to engaging with young people across the area is also to be welcomed. Finally, the proposal for an annual review of performance is sensible and will allow an assessment as to whether the outcomes and aims of the Economic Action Plan are being met.

However, the targets and indicators set for rural development in the National Park Partnership Plan do not neatly reflect the range of actions proposed. Hence arguably it will be challenging when monitoring the plan to determine whether it has been successful or not. This should be given further consideration, and appropriate targets and indicators need to be developed.

