

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2019-2022

CONSULTATION

COMMENTS FROM SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE

1. Economic Trends, Challenges, Opportunities or Data Sources

Strategic Context (p4-6)

- As well as National Context worth also referring to *International Context*. From an economic perspective the political uncertainties and instabilities are impacting and signs of a slowing *global economic growth*. Slowing growth may impact on exporting and potentially inward investment and many economic commentators have downgraded UK and Scottish growth forecasts for remainder of year and into 2020.

The impact of Brexit is clearly one of uncertainty, but will have an impact in rural areas and on current EU rural support programmes, not just CAP and agriculture-related, but also other programmes such as LEADER. Conversely, growth opportunities may be gained from exporting overseas, economic gains from low value of pound and increased innovation.

- **National Context** (p4)
 - Good alignment with NPF and SG Economic Strategy.
 - SE in May launched Building Scotland's Future Today, Scottish Enterprise's Strategic Framework 2019-2022. A key theme running throughout the Framework is that of *collaboration* – critical in all that we do and certainly applies to delivery of Cairngorms NP Economic Action Plan. A key ambition within the Strategic Framework is “Build vibrant economic communities across Scotland, spreading increased wealth and wellbeing” with a focus on working with partners to invest in infrastructure, assets and companies as a means of creating good jobs with value in thriving places where people want to live and work. More recently wellbeing linked to natural capital is becoming increasingly integrated at policy and strategic level, particularly in the context of the Climate Emergency as moves to net zero carbon emissions and energy transition gain traction and profile.
- **Cairngorms NP Context** (p4-6) – note Tay Cities Deal also falls geographically into **Park area**. Interesting and good to note complementarity of the Cairngorm LEADER Local Action Group strategy objectives with those for North & South Aberdeenshire LAGs (and other parts of rural Scotland), particularly around building community capacity; growing the economy; attracting and retaining young people; and improving transport and wider connectivity, including digital.
 - **HIE's Draft Strategic Framework – Cairngorm and Wider Area** will also provide further local context and provide opportunity for alignment, collaboration, leverage but there will need to be care to avoid duplication of effort and resource.

Review of Changes in Strategic Context (p9-11)

- As noted above and in the Plan, there are and will be some important well known national and global impacts which will impact upon the CNP area. On Brexit, it is vitally important that companies prepare for all eventualities. SE, partners and Government's Prepare for Brexit tool is designed to support businesses large and small to plan ahead. <https://www.prepareforbrexit.scot/>
- Public sector funding pressures are also well documented and therefore placing importance on growing and engaging with the private sector and leveraging investment to the area will be important in coming years.

Other key issues and drivers

An economic plan for the area will need to address other important and growing issues and drivers, some of which are drawn out in the report, but can be summarised as follows:

Net Zero and Climate emergency – with awareness of the challenge and demands on global leaders to tackle the issues increasing, the energy transition will be pulled more sharply into focus than ever;

Demographic Change – while the population in the area has increased in recent times, a projected ageing population could have an impact on productivity of the area and constrain economic strategy planning. Actions around place promotion, economic opportunity, attractiveness to younger groups will need to be addressed now.

Pace of Change of Technology and Digital Economy – the growth of industry4.0, the demands of increasing digitalisation, evolving technologies on infrastructure, skills, communities and what this could mean for new opportunities.

Inclusive Growth – Embedded within the inclusion agenda is the need to ensure sustainable approaches to growth – at both economic and environmental levels to support the low carbon future, economic diversification as well as specific approaches to transport, housing, migration and supporting productivity.

- **Strategic Factors** (p11) – the paper notes no change in the dominance of tourism and its reputation for low wage and insecure work. However, what has changed is a much greater awareness of in-work poverty nationally and is particularly relevant in an economy like the that in the CNP area. Related to that is the priority of Living Wage economies and strong efforts to promote and recognise this is occurring in places such as Dundee and Aberdeen.
 - Skills planning – as noted in the Plan actions this may be an important area and indeed opportunity for the CNP area particularly if economic diversity, including sectoral dominance, is an issue. A skills plan may help identify opportunities for sectoral growth or potentially new sectors. SDS recently prepared a **Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland 2019-21** which would be relevant for the areas such as CNP to help provided strategic support for skills planning. <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/45683/skills-action-plan-for-rural-scotland-summary-report.pdf>

- Digital connectivity will be increasing important for rural economies like the Cairngorms to sustain and encourage new businesses creating diversity and generating increased income levels

2. Actions to deliver Economic Strategy set out in the CNP Partnership Plan

Priority Themes

- The diagram (p12) could benefit from demonstrating how the themes relate to the key drivers/economic factors and then linking to the strategic opportunities and how they connect to the economic strategy priorities in Annex A.
- Cutting across all the themes, is there scope for the Plan to align with or reference the SG economic priorities around International, Innovation and Inclusive growth?

Actions

- Some of the actions are quite high level which is fine, but will need some more detailed planning (by leads/partners) around delivery milestones including time frames.
- Good to have leads and key partners identified. Have they been approached to ascertain responsibility to deliver along with capacity to deliver?
- The potential impact on labour supply arising from Brexit will be an important area to address, particularly for sectors such as Tourism and could also fit under Priority Theme 3.
- Under PT 1 the Tourism Action Plan has a strong ambition rightly to grow the sector. If there is a challenge around a more diverse economy the growth of other sectors or encouraging new sectors to develop within the area may be an action.
- Under PT 1, the Economic Action Plan could potentially capture an action around Adventure Tourism or could relate to the Tourism Action Plan. The early stage in development 'Extreme North' project being led by Opportunity North East, Scottish Enterprise, Aberdeenshire Council and VisitAberdeenshire, in consultation with industry, aims to capitalise on North East Scotland's natural assets and become a world-class destination for adventure sports tourism.
- Good to see consideration and inclusion of actions around wages, circular economy and social enterprise. They could be more powerfully included as cross-cutting actions rather than stand-alone i.e. how are these areas promoted in the way we develop sectors (Priority Theme 1) or in the way capital investment priorities are delivered (Priority Theme 4)?

3. Delivery and Monitoring

Governance

- The proposals look broadly fine. Again, key responsibilities for the co-ordination/delivery of the Plan will need to be defined for each of the groupings i.e. Steering Group, Board. Consideration should be given to private sector membership or at least engagement given potential leverage opportunities and to help secure 'buy in' from businesses. Similarly, community representation/engagement should be considered.
- The steering group could review quarterly and steer progress.

Monitoring

- Monitoring will be important. This should not be onerous in terms of plan monitoring. A high-level RAG status could be applied to each of the high-level actions, assuming that each project developed against the actions will have its own monitoring arrangements in place.
- How does the plan relate back to strategy in terms of impacts (socio-economic)? This is an important challenge for the Steering Group/Board to constantly question why are we developing or undertaking a particular action and what/who will it benefit?
- The steering group could receive a quarterly monitoring report and escalate any issues to Board that require that level of influence.

Communications

- Important to communicate successes to ensure momentum and public/private support.
- The Plan should identify some 'quick wins' to establish to engender that support and allow it to gain real traction and impact.