
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CEO REPORT

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Purpose:

- I. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation:

- a) **Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy:** The Board now have the final draft of the Forest Strategy which was consulted upon in February/March this year. The strategy is designed to ensure we look after our existing forests and to encourage significant new woodland creation across the National Park to enhance habitat networks and landscapes. A key aspect of the strategy that sets it apart from other forest strategies across Scotland is the policy guidance which incorporates the value of other non-forested landuse.
- b) **Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework:** We have now recruited five people, three hosted by CNPA, two by RSPB, to work on the development phase of the HLF Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. Many of the team will be new to this area of work and we are working with partners to integrate the HLF project into the existing, already complex, world of capercaillie conservation. The project Board and Team are supported by four newly formed working groups, providing advice and support on the project's main objectives. One of the working groups, made up of community representatives and focussed on the engagement work in the pilot community of Carr-bridge, is chaired by CNPA Board Member Rebecca Badger. Development phase will end December 2019. We plan to make a second round application for delivery phase in March 2020.
- c) **East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership:** The field work over the summer by volunteers, British Trust for Ornithology and estate keepers examining the breeding success of waders has gone well and we are awaiting the analysis of the results. The main focus of the partnership at the moment is on gathering data from estates and other partners on species and habitats to act as a baseline for monitoring change.
- d) **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership:** We are now approaching the mid-term of the work programme and the whole staff team and project leads are working extremely hard to keep to time and get all of the 20 projects delivered by

Autumn 2020. The Discovery centre is proving to be very popular with visitors. Engagement on the development of the [new website](#) has been well received locally.

- e) **Cairngorms Nature:** The draft Cairngorms Nature Action Plan is currently out for consultation, formally ending 14th September. The consultation responses will be collated and discussed by the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group late October/ early November (date tbc). The final version will be presented to CNPA Board members at the 6th December Board meeting, with a view to launching the plan early 2019.

Visitor Experience:

- a) **Long Distance Routes:**
- i. **Speyside Way:** Final planning applications have been submitted with determination expected this autumn. Funding is now in place from Low Carbon Travel and Transport (LCTT) Challenge Fund to complete the 'new build' to Newtonmore in 2019. Work is now required on signage, interpretation and creating a start/finish point at Newtonmore. We have met with all community councils along the route to discuss future work. With support from SNH we have now employed on a fixed term contract a Strategic Routes Development Officer to focus on upgrading the original route in partnership with Moray and Highland Councils.
 - ii. **Deeside Way:** A planning application will be resubmitted this autumn for the path line from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge.
- b) **Mountains and People Project:** The five year Mountains and People project within both National Parks in Scotland is approaching its fourth year. The work includes significant upgrades to 52km of key mountain paths, and the involvement and commitment of people through training, volunteering and learning. CNPA are working to maintain a sustainable legacy at the end of the project in both path maintenance and public involvement.
- c) **Active Cairngorms:** The main focus currently is improving opportunities for active travel in Aviemore. The partnership comprising CNPA, Highland Council, Hitrans and Sustrans has now delivered outline plans for delivering segregated multi-use paths through the village. These plans and the 'next steps' are covered in a separate paper.
- d) **Glenmore:** In partnership with Forest Enterprise Scotland we have submitted a bid to the Visit Scotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to construct a multi-use path through Glenmore linking car parks, visitor attractions and the path network. Final determination in early October. Forest Enterprise Scotland are redeveloping their visitor management plan including options for reciting and reopening the Allt Mor Trail that leads to CairnGorm Ski Centre. Further work is required on implementation of the Strategy overall to ensure that key development proposals are well-integrated and the public can contribute effectively.
- e) **Volunteering:** To date 14 volunteer rangers have been trained and are supporting the work of six partner ranger services. The next round of recruitment of six to

eight volunteer rangers will take place this autumn. The three way partnership between ranger services, volunteers and CNPA is working well with one very specific example being the resuscitation of a serious ill visitor to Balmoral Estate by volunteer rangers.

f) **Education and Inclusion:**

- i. Eight young people from Scotland visited Finland on the second stage of the Leader funded Europarc Youth Manifesto gathering The Youth Manifesto has been launched at the Europarc Annual Conference in Aviemore in September.
- ii. Five junior ranger training weeks have been run by schools supported by local rangers with some 71 young people completing the week long course.
- iii. To date 2,195 people have completed a John Muir Award in and around the Cairngorms this year.

g) **Information and Interpretation:** Ballater Visitor Information Centre reopened with clear information about the National Park. The Heather Centre has agreed to become a partnership information centre and is due to open Easter 2019. New interpretation about the National Park will be installed at Landmark Carr-bridge this winter. Work supporting Badenoch Great Place Project and Capercaillie Project is under way. In partnership with SNH, work has started on a revised 'Explore for a Day Leaflet'.

h) **Snow Roads Scenic Route:** CNP branded, tourist signage, funded by CNPA, has been installed along the Perth and Kinross, and Aberdeenshire sections of the route with the rest due to be in place in autumn. New interpretation at Still, Tomintoul has been installed. Cairngorms Business Partnership has developed a new brand for the route and a new, business-sponsored leaflet, launched in June. The new mobile interpretation will be launched this autumn.

Rural Development:

a) **Local Development Plan 2020:** A focussed consultation on seven new sites is ongoing until 21 September. Staff are currently working on the proposed Development Plan following consideration of consultation feedback and the steer given by Planning Committee in June. The proposed Plan will be presented to CNPA Board in December and the final, formal consultation will follow early in 2019 with potential Examination later that year.

b) **Planning casework:** Good to see two spectacular buildings for which we gave planning permission now opened in Ballater and Braemar – both are potential award winners. Fife Arms in Braemar is also due to open in December following substantial renovation. At recent Committees we have made good progress approving affordable/ starter homes and flats (70 units) in Aviemore, Kingussie, and Carrbridge. We have ongoing appeal into refusal of housing application at Ballater Old School. Some interesting applications coming up including two at Cairngorm Mountain and Aviemore Hospital. Pre-application process for new distillery at Grantown is underway.

- c) **Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP):** Membership is now at 383 businesses which is highest ever. Annual conference is on 7 November on theme “Inspiring young people to build a future in the National Park” which follows on well from Europarc conference. Snow Roads website and app will be launched at conference. Significant Growth Fund application has been submitted to VisitScotland focusing on Snow Roads promotion. Digital Tourism workshops will continue for another year and five events to be delivered before Christmas. Business Barometer for Q1 of 2018 shows that short-term confidence was well above average in recent years. Medium and long-term business confidence also high. Supplier costs, staff levels and housing availability are a concern as barriers to growth.
- d) **Economic Strategy:** Review is under way and recent positive discussions have been held with private sector grouping, coordinated by CBP, and with public sector delivery partners including Highlands and Islands Enterprise and local authorities. Due to be presented to Board later in Autumn for approval to consult.
- e) **Tourism Action Plan:** Action Plan is being delivered across broad range of projects described elsewhere in this paper, all coordinated through Cairngorms Tourism Partnership. Recent CTP meeting in Ballater discussed the forthcoming Visitor Survey and how to integrate VisitScotland and CBP Business Barometers. Results of the three applications to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund in the Park – at Muir of Dinnet, Glenmore and Ballater – are expected in early October.
- f) **Affordable Housing Delivery:** Staff are supporting three projects promoting community-led solutions – at Dulnain Bridge, Boat of Garten and Braemar. Next housing delivery group meeting is in late October. Staff are attending 20th anniversary conference of The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust. Very recent planning approvals will help deliver affordable/starter homes – see below.
- g) **A9 Dualling project:** Considerable staff effort from multiple teams contributing to planning and delivering this project with Transport Scotland. Dalrady to Slochd section is causing considerable concern regarding poor provision for Non-Motorised Users, especially between Aviemore and Carrbridge – see Board paper on same agenda.
- h) **Community-led development:** Staff have supported four community-led HLF applications in the Park – Am Fasgadh in Kingussie, Highland Wildlife Park, Inverallan 2020 in Grantown and at Braemar Castle. Support to Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Marr Area Partnership has helped a wide range of local projects including re-formation of Laggan Community Council and early work of Stathdon Development Trust and renovations at Victoria and Albert Halls in Ballater. Association of Cairngorms Communities is meeting in September and working with Cairngorms Business Partnership on post-Brexit planning. Staff and board member will attend Scottish Rural Parliament Planning in November.
- i) **Badenoch Great Place Project:** Project is going well with Project Manager Oliver O’ Grady now in place. Communications and engagement programme is now being implemented – first guided walks to look at heritage landscapes in new ways have been well attended. Two significant commissioned pieces of work

(Interpretation & marketing strategy and Themed tourist route) to help build strong, heritage-based destination strategy are progressing towards appointment of contractors. Next Project Board is in early October.

- j) **Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund:** New fund to be managed by SNH for Highland and Moray area. Challenge Fund of £5million of ERDF money. Opening in January 2019 and looking for 10 major projects to be delivered by 2022. Projects must be seeking grant of a minimum of £250k at 70% intervention rate. Suitable projects include: Interpretive media to promote natural and cultural heritage assets; Infrastructure investment to expand the provision of tourist facilities; Improved accessibility, interpretation and quality of visitor experiences; New products or services based on the region's natural and cultural resources, particularly for the tourism sector. CNPA unlikely to apply but we are working with potential applicants in Badenoch area.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- a) There have been a number of meetings with SNH, Scottish Government, LLTTNPA, Aberdeenshire Council, Moray Council, Highland Council, Transport Scotland and Cairngorms Business Partnership.
- b) There have been two Ministerial visits to the Park during the summer. The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment Mairi Gougeon visited Grantown, Tomintoul and Ballater on 24 July. On 5 August the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon visited Tomintoul and the Discovery Centre.
- c) There have been 2 EELG meetings during the summer the first of which was in the Cairngorms in June.
- d) Janet Hunter and the CEO attended the Global Sustainability Trust meeting to look at conservation finance options on 26th June.

Communications:

- a) **Cairngorms Nature Campaign:** [a final report on progress](#) made against the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan was shared at the Cairngorms Nature Seminar on 20th June with 88 partners attending. Since then the report has been widely distributed and the [consultation on the next Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2018 – 2023](#) ends on 14th September. A full report on responses and engagement will be presented at the December Board Meeting. In addition, Cairngorms Nature is promoted via the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend, Volunteering Cairngorms and the Capercaillie Framework project. To date Cairngorms Nature has over 14K social media followers.
- b) **Active Cairngorms:** the **Active Aviemore Project** has a plan in place to determine the path development required to make non-vehicle access in and around Aviemore more useable for residents and visitors. This work included significant resident and partner involvement and outline surveys to determine recommended changes to paths could be constructed. **Wee Walks Week** took place from 3-9

September and focussed on school children (parents & grandparents) as well as Health Walk groups and business participation. **Health Walks and 'Getting Started' Pathway** - in the last 6 months, 38 new walkers have joined the 25 Health Walks supported by Active Cairngorms, with 4 training sessions delivered reaching 35 volunteers including first aid and health walk leader training. Additional development work for the remainder of the year includes (1) Piloting 'Dementia Friendly' Health Walk accreditation; (2) Continuing to work in partnership with The Mountains and The People project.

- c) **Make It Yours Campaign:** the MIY 1 hour presentation continues to be successful and is particularly beneficial to new and seasonal employees. A more detailed learning experience for tourism businesses was developed and successfully trialled with an outdoor activity provider in early April and we are now considering how to take this forward. This year 44 individuals from 6 businesses have participated in these sessions and 100% of businesses said they would welcome the CNPA back in future years. Planned MIY sessions for the remainder of 2018 include: Cairngorms Activity Providers Group (x2), Heather Centre, Aviemore Hilton Hotel, New and existing CNPA board members, Aviemore and other VICs.
- d) **Marketing:** it was agreed 2017/18 marketing budget would be spent on promoting the Snow Roads scenic route by VisitCairngorms. The branding was launched at the CBP summer Conference in June and the new leaflet is widely available.
- e) **Branded Merchandise:** Branded merchandise was developed by the Grantown Museum and is sold with a small percentage of the cost going to Cairngorms Trust. Following this success VisitScotland chose to stock the same branded merchandise in their VICs in and close to the National Park. Stock was delivered in October and VisitScotland are considering extending the range. CNPA will liaise with independent VICs around the Park to support them with information about the Park and offer them the opportunity to sell the branded merchandise product range.
- f) **Partner Visitor Information Centres:** Have signed agreements from 4 Community Visitor Centres (in Blair Atholl, Nethy Bridge, Grantown on Spey and Crathie/Balmoral). Glenshee has agreed and we are awaiting signed agreement. Potential for Tomintoul (currently awaiting decision by Trust committee), Kingussie, Laggan, Blairgowrie and Glen Esk to come on board.
- g) **Visitor Giving Scheme:** CNPA Board approved the scheme in principle in June - to be called LoveCairngorms. Nancy Chambers has now been appointed as The Cairngorms Trust Manager on a three year contract and as part of her remit she will implement the scheme to raise for funds for conservation and an outdoor access projects in the Park.
- h) **Corporate Communications:**
 - Digital Communications:** a digital strategy has been prepared by Sian Jamieson and has increased our social media reach and engagement figures significantly – see statistics below:
 - i. Total social audience as of 05/09 = 30,185 (incl. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).

- ii. Total website visitors (users) since Jan 2018 = 128,855 and between June and Sept = 55,226.
 - iii. Total digital audience between June and September = 85,411.
- i) **Corporate Publications and Consultations:** The Cairngorms Forest Strategy has gone out for consultation and a final strategy will come for Board approval in September. The Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2018-2023 has gone out for consultation and a report and final strategy will come to Board for approval in December. The consultation on the draft Local Development Plan 2020 will go out for consultation in December. CNPA's Annual Report 2017/18 will be submitted to Ministers in September. Bòrd na Gàidhlig have received the second iteration of the CNPA's Gaelic Language Plan for consideration by their Board in September.
- j) **EUROPARC Conference 2018:** As part of the Year of Young People the CNPA is hosting the [EUROPARC Conference 2018](#) *Inspired by the Next Generation*, 18-21 September with over 500 delegates from across Europe attending. The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment Mairi Gougeon will open the conference and the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills John Swinney will speak in support of the Youth Manifesto to be launched on Friday 21st September. A Conference Report will be prepared by December 2018.

Organisational Development:

- a) **Office Extension Project:** 28 Staff have now moved into the new building and the moves in the existing building are also complete. Initial reactions from staff have been very positive, with the move into open plan space already facilitating more efficient joint working. Snagging is on-going but there have been no significant issues. We are arranging an informal opening for members of the local community, followed by a formal ministerial opening.

The next stage is to revisit space in the old building with a view to having a rest room, a print room, additional storage space and another meeting room, as well as redecoration throughout.

- b) **Staffing update:** Since June there has been significant activity on the recruitment front as follows:
- i. Emma Stewart joined us on a fixed term contact as a Peatland Action Project Officer.
 - ii. Nancy Chambers joined us on a fixed term contract as the Trust Manager.
 - iii. Dot Harris joined us on a fixed term contract as Support Officer- Planning.
 - iv. Emma Rawling joined us on a fixed term contract as the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project (CCP) Community Ranger.
 - v. Alison Davies joined us on a fixed term contract as the CCP Engagement Officer.
 - vi. Carolyn Robertson joined us on a fixed term contract as the CCP Project Manager.
 - vii. Internal staff moves have included promotions for Viv Roach to the Corporate Support Officer post, and Kirsty Mackenzie to the LEADER Project Development Support Officer post.

- viii. Staff still to join us, having just been recruited include Carrie Marlow to the Admin Support Officer post, and Abi Ball to the Strategic Routes Development officer post.
 - ix. We are currently recruiting the following posts: Planning Manager (permanent post to replace Jane Shepherd who resigned); Planning Officer (additional temporary resource); Conservation Officers (1 x permanent following changes in Conservation and Land Management team, and 1 x maternity cover for Hayley Wiswell); Conservation Engagement Officer (new resource following changes in Conservation and Land Management team).
- c) **Youth Employment:** On-going commitment to supporting Youth Employment, as follows:
- i. Ross Elder who came to CNPA as a 3-month Project Scotland Volunteer has been appointed to a 6-month Internship, focusing on producing photographic and video imagery for the Authority.
 - ii. Reece Musgrave joined us in August on a 2-year apprenticeship as an IT apprentice.
 - iii. Rachael Bissett joined us on 1-year Graduate Internship as a Finance Support Officer.
 - iv. Over the summer, we also supported a student from UHI on a 2-week work shadowing opportunity to gain understanding of the work of the Conservation and Land Management teams.
- d) **Organisational Development Strategy 2:** is ongoing with continuing work focused on developing a Culture of Innovation and simplifying our Project Management processes, ensuring they are fit for purpose.
- e) **Shared Services:** Continued work supporting The Scottish Land Commission HR services, with the current focus being on developing their HR policies and procedures. We are also supporting the development of the Cairngorms Local Action Group Trust (Cairngorms Trust) in the establishment of their charitable activities, with Nancy Chambers now in post to develop these aspects of the Trust's work beyond its LEADER activities.
- f) **UKNP:** We continue to lead on work on governance and application to the charity regulator on development of a national charity on behalf of UK National Parks. The aim of the charity would be to support the work of National Park Partnerships, aiming to provide a charity vehicle capable of accepting and distributing charitable donations where these could be secured from national and international corporate bodies. The final application to the Charities Regulator is planned for end September, with activity over the summer focusing on answering remaining questions from those UK National Parks who were not inclined to support formation of a national charity at the last NPUK national meeting.
- g) **LEADER:** the last few months has seen very positive movement on the Cairngorms LEADER Programme's operational status with the central government team. All monitoring issues have now been resolved, with the resolution in all cases being one of acceptance that the Cairngorms LEADER Local Action Group's (LAG's) and CNPA as Accountable Body's interpretations of guidance and regulation were

correct. The Cairngorms LEADER Programme is one of the most well advanced in Scotland. We now have 28 projects approved by the LAG with £2.003 million (90%) in LEADER funds committed, with almost half of that now represented as cash grant payments rather than a commitment highlighting the success of the programme in converting project ideas into actual community led local development delivery. Total programme value, including eligible match funding, is currently valued at £3.233 million, which excludes sizeable non-eligible match funding such as existing organisational staff supporting project delivery and “in-kind” project support.

Future Dates for Diary

- a) New ministerial appointed board members start on 1st October.
- b) The next direct elections to the CNPA Board will take place on 21 March 2019.

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September 2018

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