
CAIRNGORMS OUTDOORS ACCESS TRUST

Trust Managers Report – 3rd December Board Meeting

1. Overview

The period from September through to the end of November has seen the coming to fruition of many of the aspects of project development work on this year's business plan, including planning consent, grant application and technical design work. The development of the 2009-11 business plan has moved forward significantly with the key funders committing support. Negotiation has advanced with other potential partners for the business plan, with 'in principle' agreements reached in some cases. Grant application has taken up a considerable amount of time, with major bids being built for Climate Challenge Fund and LEADER support to the Community Networks Project. A new member of staff has been recruited for the West Cairngorms.

Staff

The recruitment process took place in October and November, with 45 application packs sent out, 12 application forms returned and 5 applicants interviewed at the CNPA office in Grantown on Spey. The field was strong, with 2 particularly good candidates identified at interview, and Chris Goodman has been offered, and accepted, the post with a start date of 5th January 2008. Chris comes with a very good technical level of experience of access work from his time with Cumbria Wildlife Trust, The National Trust for Scotland and Upland Access Ltd. He has an honours degree in Environmental Studies with Mathematics, and has gained a good knowledge of the Cairngorms through his work and his keen interest in hill-walking and wildlife.

Affiliate Membership

Andy Dunn and Robin Blyth were elected as West and East Cairngorms Affiliate representatives respectively. They have attended their first Management Group meeting, and both are keen to generate increased affiliate support in their areas. Glen Tanar Charitable Trust had sent a letter outlining their reasons not to become affiliate to COAT. Clarification on some of the issues raised appears to have improved relations, and they are content for the Firmounth path and the Mount Keen path beyond the vehicle track to be included in the Community Network and Upland projects respectively.

Finance

The accounts were approved at the AGM in September, with clarification sought on the level of 'restricted' funds reported. Our accountant has confirmed that the only unrestricted funds reported were the interest generated by UDAT. This was a long standing way of dealing with the car park income and grant received from the key funders, though could be re-visited for further clarification if desired by the Board. The key argument would be whether or not funds committed to the COAT business plan, such as CNPA grant for instance, were 'restricted', and should be differentiated, from LEADER grant for instance, specifically raised for a project such as Kingussie.

Glenmuick Car Park

No formal response has yet been received from the bus companies, though it was noted that we started to sell bus tickets for the first time in October. Follow up will be undertaken on the run up to next tourist season. Income from the Car Park looks to be well on track, with level of income at mid-November up to the £30,000 mark. Some minor maintenance was carried out on the grounds and the signs. The ticket machines may need replaced in the not too distant future, though more immediately it would be better to replace the existing notice boards.

2. 2007/8 Business Plan Update

- Alan's Health Walks leaflet has been printed and produced.

3. Path Networks Around Communities

Kingussie Bridge

Planning consent has been received for the Gynack Bridge, with SEPA lifting their objection in late October. A grant of £11,412 has been raised for the bridge from Cairngorms LEADER, with a further £7,000 committed from KCDC. A consultant engineer has been appointed, Geoff Freedman from Forestry Civil Engineering. Tenders have been received for construction of the bridge, though turnaround time for the aerial mast bridge kit is still awaited. The project is on track to complete before the end of March 2009.

The SRDP Sol was eventually given 'amber' under the Communities initiative. It was too late to turn around an application within this business year, and there is still work to be done on clarification as to what can be used to match fund, so the decision was taken to push on with LEADER. The intervention rate was fairly similar. However it was a useful indication that future one-off projects such as bridges could be eligible under this scheme.

Strathdon

The Climate Challenge Fund have agreed to provide a £25,000 grant to the Strathdon School Path Project, and there is a LEADER application currently being evaluated for this project. This is the first time that an access project has received CCF funding, and it is hoped that this opens up a new avenue for funding in the next business plan. In the meantime the specification and pre-tender documents are being compiled and the contract will be issued for tender by the end of November, with a view to site works starting during January 2009.

Wallace Stone have completed first draft of the Strathdon bridge design, and are working up second draft having received comment from COAT

Tarland

A grant application has been lodged with LEADER to support this project, and this will be evaluated during the run in to Christmas. We hope it will be successful though there has been discussion with LEADER about the level of supporting information required to justify the project. SNH have agreed to fund a further £20,000 to COAT this year for this project specifically, a very welcome addition. The pre-tender documents will be compiled and the contract issued for tender by early December.

Lowland Path Maintenance

Minor Maintenance works were carried out at Crathie and Clarack all-abilities paths.

4. Mountain paths and strategic routes

Upland Path Project

The upland path project is the main area of work that has experienced slippage this year. Surveys were carried out at Lochnagar during the period, covering the Main Path, Meikle Pap, Glas Allt, Broad Cairn and Dubh Loch. The follow up workshop will now have to be put back to the new year, and surveys still remain to be carried out at Glittering Skellies, The Snub, Jocks Road, Coire Domhain, Goat Track and the Windy Ridge path at Cairngorm. The latter was not initially submitted as part of the survey, but has been included during discussion with HIE regarding support for 2009-11 business plan.

Strategic Routes

Some work may be possible on the Speyside Way, dependent on the level of grant that comes in from the two outstanding LEADER applications within this year. Discussion has taken place at an advanced level with Aberdeenshire Council to manage the section of Deeside Way between Potarch Bridge and Kincardine O Neill on a consultancy basis. The work is on a very tight time-line and to date COAT staff have carried out site visits, re-drawn the Bill of Quantities, worked up a contractor list and issued this to Aberdeenshire Council to tender.

5. Associated visitor infrastructure

Signposting

The project regarding standards in signposting will be taken forward in the New Year.

Interpretive Boards

Work on the Braemar interpretive board will be carried out later in the year

6. Promotion, marketing and development of business opportunities to generate sustainable economic benefits

All-Abilities Leaflets

The all-abilities leaflet is being worked up as an exemplar model for leaflet design within the National Park. The contract has been compiled for design and will be issued and paid for by the CNPA officers with oversight on the tenders and project from COAT.

Web Design

Another staff training session has been carried out to develop this and we now have developing 'Latest News', Health Walks, About Us, and Affiliate web pages. As we become more competent and confident the level of work on this should increase markedly.

7. Health and wellbeing

The funding application to the HIF was refused initially, though at the last steering group indication was given that some NHS Grampian funding would be forthcoming. More encouragingly Paths to Health indicated that they would be prepared to increase their input to £10,000 for this. Health Walks have been ongoing at Strathdon, Tarland, Logie Coldstone, Aboyne, Ballater, Alford as well as one specifically for Alzheimers. First aid training has been organised for December for volunteer leaders, and the leaflet has finally been completed.

Dougie Baird - November 2008