

## REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 22 AUGUST 2019

### CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

#### 1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider and provide feedback on the appended draft response to the consultation on the Cairngorms National Park Authority Economic Action Plan (2019-2022); and
- 1.2 Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure Services, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson of the Infrastructure Services Committee, to submit the final response to the Park Authority by the 20<sup>th</sup> September deadline; the response to include comments from both this Committee and the Marr Area Committee (which will consider the same response on 20<sup>th</sup> August).

#### 2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) launched a formal public consultation on its Economic Action Plan (2019-2022) on 26 June 2019. The consultation period ends on 20 September 2019. The Economic Action Plan sets out how the Park Authority and its partners and stakeholders will work together to deliver the economic strategy elements of the Park's Partnership Plan 2017-2022.
- 2.2 A copy of the Economic Action Plan as published for consultation is available [here](#). It gives an overview of the strategic context for the Plan, including any significant changes since the economic strategy was first developed in 2015. It then proposes five priority themes for the period to 2022 as follows:
  - Building on the economic strengths of the park
  - Supporting and attracting businesses
  - Education, training and skills development
  - Infrastructure and capital investment
  - Community and enterprise
- 2.3 The consultation consists of three key questions about the proposed Economic Action Plan focussing on the strategic context; priority actions and delivery and monitoring arrangements. A full draft response is appended to this report (**Appendix 1**). In summary, it is proposed that Aberdeenshire Council:

- Welcomes the Economic Action Plan and its ambitions for the sustainable economic growth of the Cairngorms National Park;
- Supports the overall structure of the Plan but suggests changes to the priority themes to consolidate priorities and strengthen the Plan as a whole. The Council's response is structured around the proposed consolidated priorities;
- Recognises that the Council will be an important enabler and contributor to many of the actions proposed;
- Commits to aligning its economic development resource investment in the National Park area with actions and initiatives outlined in the Plan;
- Offers to work with the Park Authority on delivery arrangements in the Aberdeenshire area of the Park, and in particular on securing delivery and investment commitments from partner agencies and stakeholders.

2.4 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section F.3.2. of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to external consultation within the delegation of the Committee.

### **4 Implications and Risk**

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council would recommend that the Cairngorms National Park Authority undertakes an Equalities Impact Assessment on the Economic Action Plan.

4.2 There are no direct financial or staffing implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

4.3 Whilst Ballater is not included in Aberdeenshire's key towns list, a Town Centre First Impact Assessment has been carried out (**Appendix 2**) recognising the importance of Ballater as a small town and service centre in the National Park area. It concludes that there is the potential for positive impacts for local businesses and residents through increased investment in housing, tourism and digital initiatives in Ballater.

4.3 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level: Working with other organisations; and at a Strategic Level: Economic Development.

**Stephen Archer**  
**Director of Infrastructure Services**

Report prepared by Matt Lockley, Economic Development Service Manager, 25 July 2019

## Appendix 1

### **Aberdeenshire Council response to Cairngorms National Park Authority draft Economic Action Plan**

Aberdeenshire Council welcomes the Park Authority's consultation on its proposed Economic Action Plan ('the Plan'), supporting delivery of the Partnership Plan and covering the period to 2022. The Council supports the focus of the Plan on inclusive and sustainable growth and initiatives to address the challenges outlined in the Rural Development strand of the Partnership Plan. Clearly the Council is already involved in many of the objectives and actions set out in the plan and we are keen to work with the Park Authority to ensure greater alignment and impact going forward.

Aberdeenshire Council delivers a comprehensive range of services to and with communities, businesses and visitors to the Park. We have significant contributions to make to the delivery of the Plan:

- As an enabler of economic growth – through our housing development activities, our property portfolio, our planning services and our investment in the road and public transport networks;
- As an investor in economic growth – through our schools and community learning and development services, our investment in tourism through Visit Aberdeenshire, our housing development activities and schemes such as Supporting Aberdeenshire Businesses;
- As an advocate for the Park – brokering investment through initiatives such as Digital Scotland, R100 and the City Region Deal and supporting applications to funding streams such as the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

The Council's response to the three questions in the plan is provided below. In terms of the structure of the priority themes and actions, we have proposed some minor changes to create what we feel are more logical groups of activity. This results in a reduction from five to four priority themes but we feel that it strengthens the Plan overall.

#### **Question 1**

##### **Strategic context**

Aberdeenshire Council agrees with the Park Authority's overall assessment of the strategic context. In terms of climate emergency, the Council recognises the significant impact that recent lobbying of governments has had in accelerating responses to climate change issues. Aberdeenshire Council has already committed to achieving a 44% reduction in its own emissions by 2025 and is the first local authority in Scotland to have a dedicated Carbon Budget.

Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee will be considering a report on climate emergency at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> August and the outcome of that discussion will be factored in to the Council's final response to the Economic Action Plan consultation.

On post-Brexit funding, the Council is actively involved (through SLAED and COSLA and through individual representations to the Scottish and UK Governments) in discussions on priorities for any future funding streams and we are committed to continuing to push a strong focus on sustainable development initiatives, the rural economy and funding for sectors that are vital to the Park's economic viability (agriculture, forestry, digital and creative industries and tourism). We would also be keen to work with the Park Authority on any future phases of the City Region Deal model to ensure that investment priorities in the Aberdeenshire part of the Park are identified and included as negotiation priorities.

Finally, on regional economic partnerships the Plan does not mention Opportunity North East. As the principal public-private partnership focussed on economic growth in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire (and including Moray for the food and drink sector) we recommend that this omission is rectified. Opportunity North East is investing its own resources in economic growth and brokering additional investment in sectors including tourism, digital and food and drink, all of which are critical to the Park's future economy.

**Question 2**  
**Priority themes and actions**

<b>Priority theme 1</b>	<b>Building on the economic strengths of the park</b>
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Aberdeenshire Council comments</b>
Wages – investigate and promote adoption of a living wage scheme for the Cairngorms National Park.	Aberdeenshire Council is supportive of efforts to improve job security and tackle in-work poverty and recognises the role that a living wage scheme can have in contributing to this, particularly in areas where the economy is dominated by lower skilled and lower paid, often seasonal work. We would also suggest consideration of the use of the real living wage for the scheme, as it is higher than the national living wage and applies to all people aged 18+. This could be an important part of wider efforts to retain younger people in the Park area.
Tourism – implement the Tourism Action Plan through the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership	Support, Aberdeenshire Council is actively engaged in this partnership.
Forestry – pilot a woodland challenge fund scheme to incentivise woodland planting and uptake of Forestry Grant Scheme	Support. CNP's forest strategy (2018) notes the importance of forestry to the area and to the continuing development of a 'forest culture' in the area. The forest strategy's 'vision' refers to the production of high quality timber (to help sustain the 2 major sawmills and several smaller mills in the park) while under strategic objective 8 there is a commitment to

	encourage innovative use and marketing of forest products (ultimately to displace more energy intensive construction materials such as concrete, brick and steel and fulfil climate change obligations).
Rural development frameworks – pilot development of rural development frameworks with estates and communities to provide long-term planning for land use, business development and housing across estates	Aberdeenshire Council is supportive of economic development in the Park provided it complements the retention and protection of the natural and built environment. In terms of housing, we would encourage the development of smaller scale housing schemes that can help deliver houses for locals and retain a younger working population. Essential needs housing could be expanded to go beyond the normal primary based industries to encourage small scale employment in rural areas.
Agriculture – build the case for a regionalised approach to future support for land management in the Cairngorms	Support. The Plan should also commit to helping the farming/land-based sector to diversify, become more market-facing and less subsidy-dependent. Moreover, the processing sector plays a critical role in providing an outlet/market for primary agricultural production (only too apparent when processing capacity is lost). The Plan should work towards the creation of an enabling business environment to sustain and develop local processing capacity and enhance the Park’s contribution to the Scottish Government’s Ambition 2030 for the food and drink sector.
Cairngorm Mountain – develop a long-term masterplan and investment package for Cairngorm Mountain as part of the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy	Support, propose similar masterplan and investment package development for Glenshee (see below).
Glenshee and the Lecht – develop plans to invest in and diversify these sites to sustain local employment and enhance the visitor experience	Aberdeenshire Council is actively engaged with the Glenshee Ski Centre on its plans to anchor winter sports at the site and to diversify to create a genuine year-round visitor destination. We propose that a masterplanning and investment funding exercise for Glenshee (by 2022) should be a priority and Aberdeenshire Council may be willing to contribute some seed funding to support such an exercise.

Economic and social data – work to improve the availability and use of economic and social data on the Park	Aberdeenshire Council will positively contribute to any joint working arrangement that can improve the economic and social data on the Park and its application to support future investments and strategies.
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<b>Priority theme 2</b>	<b>Business and enterprise</b>
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Aberdeenshire Council comments</b>
Attracting talent and investment – promote work/lifestyle benefits of the Cairngorms National Park through development of website content, eg Talent Scotland	Aberdeenshire Council would be keen to work on the investment attraction aspect with the Park Authority and Invest Aberdeen, the inward investment hub for the City Region. There are opportunities to promote both investment propositions and the work/lifestyle benefits of the Park through Invest Aberdeen activity. We would also be keen to see the CNPA utilise the new 'Abzolutely' marketing material that has been created for the region.
Supporting business – investigate potential for new models of business support including community-led and social enterprise models	Business Gateway is the common business support programme across the Park. Aberdeenshire Council would be keen to see a more active partnership between the Park Authority and Business Gateway to ensure that the needs of businesses within the Park are met and that opportunities for future inclusive growth are optimised.
Circular economy - develop a business-led initiative to promote the circular economy of the National Park	The Circular North East programme (hosted by the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce) provides advice and access to grants to companies across Aberdeenshire. We would be keen to see links developed between this project and the Park Authority. Aberdeenshire Council's Sustainability Committee has approved a commitment to the circular economy and we would be interested to discuss further roll-out of this across public and third sector partners in the Park area.
Mitigation and adaptation to climate change – support businesses to reduce their emissions and adapt to future climate issues in their business and supply chains.	Aberdeenshire Council would be interested in the co-design and delivery of business-facing climate change programmes, possibly through the Business Gateway programme.
Developing an entrepreneurial culture-develop a programme of events to	See note above on Business Gateway. Aberdeenshire Council manages the

<p>stimulate a positive and creative approach to doing business within the Park in all sectors</p>	<p>Business Gateway contract for the area and could work with the provider and the Park Authority on discrete activity for businesses in the Park area. In addition, we are working on pilot initiatives such as LINA (Library Innovation Network Aberdeenshire) with Robert Gordon University. This is a LEADER funded project (in 4 towns in North Aberdeenshire at present) to bring innovation and entrepreneurship support to local communities that could, in the future, be rolled out to other locations.</p>
<p>Social enterprise training – review arrangements to follow on from Social Enterprise Academy training project</p>	<p>See note above on Business Gateway.</p>

<p><b>Priority theme 3</b></p>	<p><b>Community development, training and skills</b></p>
<p><b>Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Aberdeenshire Council comments</b></p>
<p>Digital training – deliver training for tourism sector</p>	<p>We would be supportive of efforts to deliver more and enhanced digital skills training to businesses across all sectors, recognising that online trading is one way that businesses in more remote locations can continue to compete with those based in urban areas. Aberdeenshire Council could secure delivery of digital training for businesses in key settlements within the Park through the Digital Boost programme, and other local authority partners to the Park Authority should be able to do the same. In addition, a priority in Aberdeenshire Council’s agreement with Visit Aberdeenshire is for Visit Aberdeenshire to deliver training in digital skills to tourism businesses. We would be keen to see this done collaboratively with the Park Authority.</p>
<p>Skills – continued delivery of regional Skills Investment Plans throughout the Park</p>	<p>Support. We would encourage the Regional Skills Planning Leads (Skills Development Scotland) covering the Park area to work together on delivering skills programmes that are specifically designed for the National Park. We would be interested in working with the Park Authority on an employability strategy for the area, addressing the issues that are unique to the Park and enabling sustainable employment</p>

	opportunities in and around key settlements.
Invest in community-led development – secure continuity of investment in local enterprise development, including farm diversification to follow on from current LEADER programme	We are keen to secure a legacy from the current LEADER programmes operating in Aberdeenshire and would take the same view with the Cairngorms LEADER programme. We are working with the North and South LAGs in Aberdeenshire to define and develop a future role for the groups, which will provide a strong platform for bidding for any future UK or Scottish Government rural CLD funding rounds.
Young people – develop a programme of action with young people to maximise opportunities and address barriers to living and working in the Park	Aberdeenshire Council is very supportive of this action and would like to work with the Park Authority and other public and third sector partners on initiatives that support young people living and working in the Park in the future. The resilience and viability of Park communities is very much a focus of the Council. For example, we are soon to start piloting a job club for young people in Ballater and we are also enabling affordable housing delivery in the town. We would like to work with the Park Authority on building the investment case for schemes such as this into the future.

<b>Priority theme 4</b>	<b>Infrastructure and capital investment</b>
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Aberdeenshire Council comments</b>
Housing delivery – undertake a review of vacant and derelict land and property, stalled development sites and impacts of short-term lets, to identify interventions and opportunities for public interest development	Support, and bring forward sites that are in Aberdeenshire Council’s ownership when viable to do so.
Community-led housing delivery – promote new community-led approaches to delivery of housing in communities across the Park using Rural Housing Fund	Support.
Business-led housing delivery – pilot and encourage business-led housing projects for employees	Support.
Digital connectivity – plan and deliver the Scottish Government ‘Reaching 100’ programme to deliver superfast broadband to all premises and enhance mobile connectivity	Aberdeenshire Council is working closely with the Scottish Government on its plans for the R100 programme and is actively involved with the current procurement exercise. We continue to make the case for public sector subsidy to be targeted at

	<p>the areas that are most difficult to reach. We are exploring mixed public sector / commercial investment models in other parts of Aberdeenshire but these may prove difficult to replicate in the Park area due to the physical constraints and the dispersed nature of much of the population.</p> <p>We are also working with the Scottish and UK Governments and other local authority partners on potential investments in 5G mobile phone connectivity.</p>
<p>Capital investment priorities – continue to deliver on the priorities as set out in the Park Partnership Plan</p>	<p>Support. We are keen to see the project to develop the new path from Braemar to Old Bridge of Dee delivered.</p>

**Consultation question 3**  
**Delivery and monitoring**

Aberdeenshire Council supports the high-level delivery and monitoring arrangements as proposed and will continue to engage in Park Authority delivery and governance activities where appropriate to do so. We welcome the proposal to co-ordinate delivery through existing structures rather than creating new groups or governance tiers.

We would welcome further details on the types of performance indicators and outcomes the Park Authority proposes to use to measure the impact of the Economic Action Plan. For example, will measures such as the number of businesses and employees on the park area be captured? A business survey in the Park area could be a useful addition and would generate significant baseline data and could be repeated in alternate years to check on progress.



### TOWN CENTRE FIRST IMPACT ASSESSMENT (TCFIA)

Aberdeenshire Council recognises that town centres have an important role to play in the sustainable development of local economies.

The Town Centre First Impact Assessment (TCFIA) allows officers in all services to identify the detrimental and beneficial effects that decisions we take may have on our town centres. It will allow officers to consider any implications that council decisions may have on Aberdeenshire's key town centres. Examples of this include changes to: the provision of civic and community facilities, employment land, retail, residential buildings, cultural assets, transportation, leisure and tourism.

A Town Centre Ambassador has been nominated within your service, you can locate your Town Centre First Ambassador through the Town Centre First Principle Arcadia pages.

Project Information	
Title of Committee Paper	CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN – CONSULTATION RESPONSE
Service	Infrastructure Services
Department	Economic Development
Author	Matt Lockley
Have you consulted your Town Centre First Ambassador?	Yes

- 1) Could your Project Paper cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres? – Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Inverurie, Westhill, Stonehaven, Ellon, Portlethen, Banchory, Turriff, Huntly, Banff, Macduff.

No

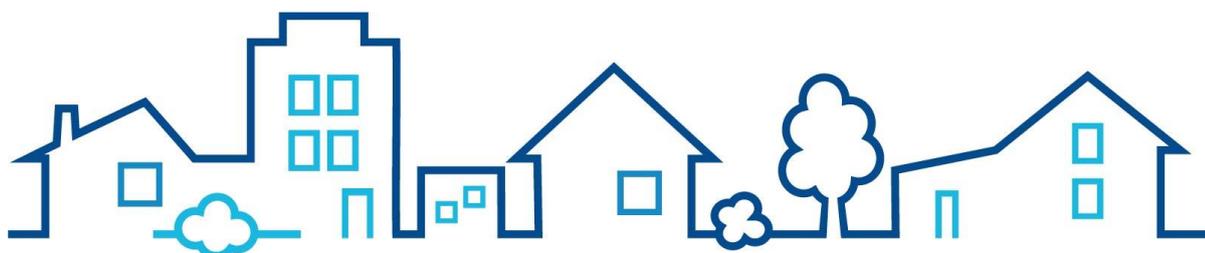
- 2) If approved would your project cause an impact (either positive or negative) with regards to the footfall of any of these town centres?

No

3)

Please describe the aims of the committee paper?

To seek input to the Council's response to consultation on the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Economic Action Plan.  
A town centre impact assessment has been completed; although Ballater is not one of the identified towns, the economic growth expected from the delivery of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Economic Action Plan will have a positive impact on the town centre of Ballater.

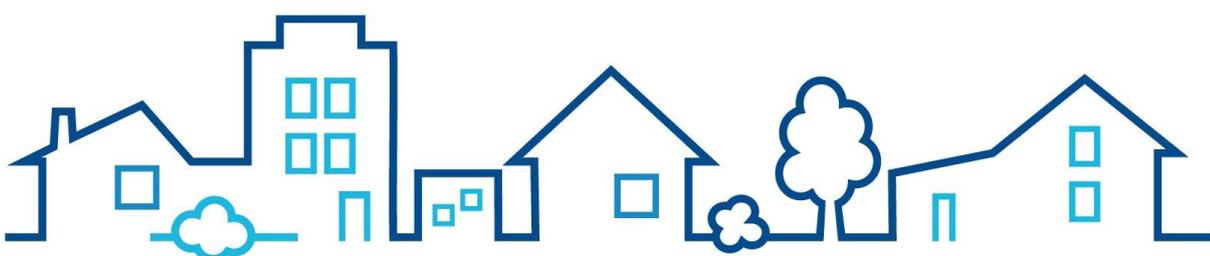




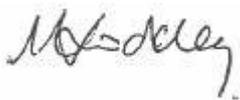
4) What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impact	Describe the positive impact?	Describe the negative impact?
Please detail any potential positive and negative impact the project may have on Aberdeenshire's Key Town Centres.	<p>The Economic Action Plan seeks to support sustainable economic development in the Cairngorms National Park Authority area. It covers issues such as infrastructure (including affordable housing and digital), employment and skills, business growth and tourism. The Plan proposes priority actions that will deliver economic growth in a way that is appropriate and meaningful for the National Park.</p> <p>Ballater is not a key town centre but it is a principle service centre for the Aberdeenshire part of the National Park. It stands to benefit from priority actions in the Plan.</p>	Unlikely to be any negative impacts from the Plan as it is currently drafted, given that it is relatively high level. There could be short-term negative impacts from specific projects as and when they are delivered (i.e. new housing development might cause some disruption).

5) What mitigating steps will be taken to reduce or remove negative impacts? If none see Q6	
Mitigating Steps	Timescale
None required.	

6) Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.
Negative impacts are not anticipated and delivery of the priority actions within the Economic Action Plan should have a wide range of positive impacts for businesses and communities across the National Park and in towns such as Ballater.





Question 7: Sign off and Authorisation	
3) <b>Author:</b> I have completed the TCIA impact assessment for this policy/ activity.	<p>Name: Matt Lockley</p> <p>Position: Economic Development Service Manager</p> <p>Date: 25/07/19</p> <p>Signature: </p>
4) Consultation with Service Manager	<p>Name: NA</p> <p>Position:</p> <p>Date:</p>
5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	<p>Name: Belinda Miller</p> <p>Position: Head of Service, Economic Development and Protective services</p> <p>Date: 25/07/19</p>
6) Have you consulted with your Town Centre First Ambassador?	Yes
	Audrey Michie
7) TCFIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: tcfia@aberdeenshire.gov.uk	Date Sent: 25/07/19

