

RE-EVALUATION

Verifier's Report to the Evaluation Committee

Name of protected area: Cairngorms National Park (CNP)

Name of verifier: Amanda Guzmán

Date of submission of re-evaluation application by protected area: 31st December 2016

Date of verification visit: 29th – 31st May 2017

Date of completion of this report: 6th July 2017

NOTES FOR THE VERIFIER

Where is shown, verifiers are asked to indicate a score, using the following system:

- X** Not relevant
- 0** Not happening
- 1** Weak – little action
- 2** Moderate – action happening in this area, sufficient at present
- 3** Good – significant action, totally satisfactory

A star * may be added to a "3" score to indicate an excellent example of best practice (3*).

Verifiers are asked to comment on individual questions to provide further information or explanation, keeping their answers concise. In particular, the reasons for any score under 2 should be briefly explained, highlighting any particular causes for concern.

The reasons for any score of * awarded should also be explained: what makes this an example of best practice? The star should be used sparingly, and only for outstanding initiatives or actions which can serve as models at the European level.

The format for this verifier's report is linked closely to that of the Application Report completed by the protected area. You should have received the Application Report in electronic format. You may copy information from the Application Report into this report to support particular answers where this is helpful.

If you do this, we would ask you to indicate very clearly (e.g. by use of a different typeface, highlighting, etc.) the text which has been copied from the Application Report.

Your own observations relating to the information provided by the protected area and gained on site are, of course, particularly important – the Committee will have the full Application Report available to refer to as necessary.

Please attach a list of any documents received from the protected area or presented during the visit which were not included in the original application.

Programme of visit, key sites and partners visited:

Please attach a full list of people interviewed and job titles as an appendix

The program of the visit was very intense and complete. Although the CNP is very large and diverse, we were able to visit the main sites where sustainable tourism actions have been implemented or are planned to be developed, as well as several main tourist attractions.

The visit program prepared by the Park allowed me to meet a large number of stakeholders involved in the park's management and sustainable tourism plan, as well as some private businesses.

See attached the list of the sites visited, the partners interviewed and the topics addressed.

Brief details of the PA and overall impressions

Please indicate very briefly:

- **Location, size, population, IUCN Category (or equivalent), nature of the PA Authority, key features of the PA, level of tourism**
- **Context of the re-application (e.g. any issues relating to the decision to reapply)**
- **Overall impressions of the PA**

The Cairngorms National Park (CNP) is located in the north of Scotland, in the heart of the Highlands. It was established in 2003 and covers an extension of 542,800 ha. - the largest National Park in the UK and nearly twice the size of the next largest National Park.

CNP is an IUCN Category V Protected Landscape where almost 50% of the territory is protected with other designations: 42 Natura 2000 sites, 11 National Nature Reserves, 59 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 3 Ramsar convention sites.

As referenced in the CNP Partnership Plan about the CNP:

- “This is where we find some of Scotland’s wildest land, arctic-like mountain plateaux and Scotland’s most extensive semi-natural pine forest, home to 80% of our capercaillie population.”
- “Over a quarter of the UK’s rare and threatened species are found in the CNP”
- “The landscapes of the National Park are valued by many and underpin the area’s economy. The mix of mountain plateaux, moorlands, woodlands and farmed straths are shaped by nature and working land use, reflecting both our natural and cultural heritage.”

The CNP covers five of the six highest mountains of Scotland.

75% of the CNP is privately owned, often managed as part of large estates under the control of one owner or group of trustees. Just 10% is public land managed by Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage or Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The remaining 15% of the land is owned and managed by conservation charities including National Trust for Scotland and Royal Society for the Protection of birds. These organizations manage much of the central montane plateau area.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is a “non-departmental public body” established by the Scottish Parliament and funded almost entirely by Scottish Government (€5.43 million for the year 2016-2017). The CNPA is designed to be an enabling organisation, promoting partnership working and giving leadership to all those involved in the Cairngorms to ensure that the four aims of the Scottish National Parks are collectively achieved in a coordinated way. CNPA also has statutory planning powers (influencing where and how built development can happen) and outdoor access powers (influencing how people can access the land for recreation).

There are a total of 67 staff (60 full time equivalent posts) employed by CNPA and a Board of 19 members - very well regulated and structured.

As an enabling entity without direct competencies in most of the activities developed in the CNP, the CNPA has built close and stable relationships with the stakeholders in the CNP and promotes proper participation, planning and management.

Many municipalities and their populations – 18,594 inhabitants in 2014 – are included in the CNP boundaries.

Tourism in the CNP is one of the most important economic sectors as it accounts for 43% of employment and 30% of its economy (GVA). It is estimated that the CNP receives over 1.68 million visitors a year, with a high proportion of overnight visitors (51%) attracted by landscape, wildlife, culture, tranquillity and great variety of activities.

There are a wide range of attractions across the Park, with a particular cluster of outdoor family attractions in the west of the Park, and a strong culture and heritage offering in Royal Deeside and Atholl with Balmoral Castle, Blair Castle and the community-run Braemar Castle attracting an older demographic.

As well as the values and attractions, the tourism activity throughout the park is quite diverse, and the Park and its partners have settled different tourism strategies for different sites. For example, to improve visitor management and experience in the most visited area of the park: Cairngorm & Glenmore, and a strategy of rural developments and tourism enhancement in Tomintoul & Glenlivet area, where there are less visitors and tourism activity.

As a singularity for the European context, is worth mentioning that the Scottish legislation gives everyone rights of access over land and inland water throughout Scotland, subject to specific exclusions and as long as they behave responsibly. This applies widely to Scotland's countryside – including protected areas and private land - and include walking, cycling and other non-motorised activities. However the Scottish Outdoor Access Code establishes proper guidance on responsibility, both for land managers and for those exercising the rights.

As a result, the strategy for nature conservation and visitor behaviour most of the time relies on proper information, awareness and self-commitment of visitors and inhabitants. This makes the things slower but, in return, the progress is more effective and durable.

Comments on the application from the Charter area and re-evaluation visit: Please raise any points and issues relating to the process

The CNP was awarded with the Charter in 2005 and re-awarded in 2011. The Park was supposed to present the next re-evaluation application in 2015, but it was agreed with the EUROPARC Federation to delay it one year to better fit the process of evaluation, consultation and development of the Cairngorms Partnership Plan – the overall management plan of the park – and the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan.

Also with previous consultation with the EUROPARC Federation, the CNPA has submitted as the main planning document the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022, which includes various strategies and plans related to sustainable tourism and the Charter Key Topics. Attending to its implementation period, it seems it will be needed again one extra year to present the next re-evaluation application.

In addition, the Park has submitted the CNP Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) developed by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) with the same period of implementation 2017-2022.

Although the level of detail of these plans is not very deep – concrete activities, budget, schedule or partners are not defined yet - the CNPA and its partners usually detail all these

aspects when they are designing and executing every concrete project. It has been so in previous years and is expected to be so in the next period.

To show the results of the delivery of the previous action plan the Park has submitted a document with a summary of the implementation of every action and an interesting monitoring report about the level of achievement of its strategic objectives thought the indicators defined.

The CNPA submitted a good Re-evaluation Application Report although there have been more actions developed than the ones related in the D Section. It was very useful for the verification another document submitted where the CNPA identify how the new CNPPP, the STAP and other plans address the different key topics of the European Charter.

Furthermore, the Park have provided a wide range of supplementary documentation before, during and after the visit, that showed the work done and planned to progress on sustainable tourism.

During the visit I was at all times accompanied by Park staff in charge of the Charter and the new verifier Rolands Auziņš.

Finally, I would like to thank all the CNPA staff who organized, coordinated and accompanied us during the visit. Also I would like to thank all the stakeholders who kindly explained their activities to me and sincerely answered all my questions.

Verifier's assessment

Please provide your overall assessment of the management of sustainable tourism and the content and delivery of the strategy and action plan in the protected area, in relation to the European Charter. Please include an overall comment on the progress of the Charter area and its partners over the past five years:

As evidenced by the monitoring report, the CNP has progressed in the achievement of the strategic objective established in Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2011-2016, e.g.:

- Tourism growth: There has been an increase on number of visitors (4.1%) and average length of stay (11.7%), the direct expenditure on tourism (6.89%) and its economic impact (6.8%). There has been also an increase in direct employment (12%).
- Fulfil visitors expectations and needs: Visitors are more satisfied (score of 8.8 in 2014/2015 compared with 8.3 in 2009/2010). There are more visitors willing to repeat their visit (66% compared with 58%) and more visitors that had visited CNP a large number of times (28% had been at least 11 times compared to 12%).
- Strengthen awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the CNP: Awareness has been increasing over time – only 9% were not aware they were in a National Park in 2014-15, compared to 31% in 2003-04. And there are more visitors engaging walking&cycling activities.

There were also improvements on spreading visitors in time and space and figures of indicators on nature conservation.

This monitoring provides clear evidences with indicators that are well communicated to the stakeholders.

During the last years there has been a consolidation of the participation structures more directly involved in tourism activity. The Cairngorms Business Partnership has increased its membership and developed interesting activities. The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership has enabled public and private members to work together.

The establishment of clear strategies, to better manage visitors in more frequented areas (Cairngorm & Glenmore), and to enhance tourism activity in less visited areas (Tomintoul & Glenlivet) is another important step forward.

There has been maintenance and significant improvement of visitor infrastructures: path network, long-distance paths, mountain biking infrastructures, visitor centres, information points, ranger basis, etc. As well as an improvement on information and interpretation materials and tools.

There is also a higher involvement and engagement of different entities with the National Park and wider use of its common image, identity and brand, what has been enhanced by the Make it Yours program.

There has also been a significant progress on responsible and joint promotion of the CNP as a destination with the efforts of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Visit Scotland. For the first time there has been a Regional Marketing Strategy for the CNP attending to the aims of sustainable tourism development.

Main strengths: (relating to the Charter process and sustainable tourism management)

- Partnerships and local involvement:

The CNP is definitely well managed in partnership. The CNPA works always in partnership with the local stakeholders (businesses, local governments, local community, landowners, conservation interests, etc.) through several participation groups and forums that are leaded or supported by the CPNA.

Regarding tourism, there are two main participation structures, the Cairngorms Business Partnership and the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, that effectively work to enhance tourism activity while ensuring conservation.

Furthermore, in the Cairngorms there is strong tradition of local involvement and voluntary work. Charity entities and local community groups enable make further progress with the available economic resources.

- Park planning:

Outstanding efforts have been done in the territory to develop a clear, consistent, comprehensive and participated Park Planning that enables proper coordination between the local stakeholders to achieve sustainable development and conservation.

The planning process is based in relevant assessments and stakeholders consultation and the CNPPP and further strategies, plans and projects have clear and measurable objectives that are well monitored and efficiently communicated.

- Information about visitors and tourism activity:

The CNPA develops every 5 years a consistent and comprehensive year long **Visitor Survey** to gather information about visitor profile and behaviour, volumes of use, visitors' knowledge and attitudes, and the impacts of information provided to visitors. This survey allows to evaluate very effectively the impact of the plans and policies implemented in the territory measuring the degree of achievement of the objectives.

Furthermore the CNP have information about the tourism activities from other two sources:

- The **Business Barometer**: since 2009 the Cairngorms Business Partnership – with the support of the CNPA - develops a quarterly and annual report about business performance and insights with information provided by predominantly tourism-related businesses across the Cairngorms National Park.
- The **STEAM Model**: The volume and value of tourism has been estimated by the CNPA using the STEAM model annually (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor in Scotland).

As a result the CNP has a reliable information base to evaluate progress and plan future actions.

The responsible entities also do a good job of communicating the main result through useful infographics and summaries.

- Tools to raise awareness and engagement with the CNP

The **Cairngorms National Park Brand** was developed in 2004 to provide a strong identity for the National Park and it has positively achieved its objective with 140 Charter Brand holders and 91% of the visitors aware of its National Park status (20% increase since 2003/2004).

It is available for use by businesses, organisations, communities, event organisers, schools working within the Park, etc. It is for free and they just have to sign a Brand Charter with some commitments regarding the proper use of the brand, sustainability and quality.

With the **Make it Yours program** the CNPA has boosted engagement of tourism business with the Park, on the basis of the Park Brand scheme, and it is foreseen to further develop the program with other relevant stakeholders.

Progressively the different entities of the CNP are using the National Park brand and image, giving the territory a singularity and common identity linked to the national park (sign posting, path leaflets, information points, etc.).

Furthermore, the **Communicating Cairngorms** online tool kit provides reliable information, quality images, maps and other resources about the CNP.

- Visitor infrastructures and facilities:

The CNP has an extensive network of visitors infrastructures that have been maintained and considerably enhanced in the last 5 years: core paths, community paths, long distance ways, mountain biking facilities, ranger basis, visitor centres, information points and a wide range of visitor attractions.

Visitor information and interpretation have been also improved. There is now a set of community paths leaflets developed with a common image linked to the National Park identity.

Main weaknesses: (relating to the Charter process and sustainable tourism management)

- Conservation issues

Some conservation issues in the CNP are directly related to tourism (outdoor acces) or can affect tourism:

- o Impact of visitors to vulnerable species. This is especially important in the case of ground nesting birds, included the Capercaille.
- o Illegal raptor persecution that affect the image and reputation of the National Park as a sustainable nature tourism destination.

- High concentration of visitors in certain places and times

Although efforts have been done to enhance a better distribution of visitors throughout the park and some progress has been achieved, there is still an important concentration of visitors – arriving mainly by car – to the area of Glenmore&Cairngorm. As a result, in certain times there are traffic and car parking problems that affect the visitor experience. There is a strategy focused on managing visitors in this area but effective measures to reduce the use of car to arrive there in certain times and to improve public transport are not specifically foreseen.

- Need of deeper knowledge about the whole CNP to inform visitors

An important improvement has been made on information and interpretation, but there is still a lack of deep knowledge of front line staff of tourism businesses and information points about the values and tourism attractions in the whole National Park. Information is given usually just about the nearby possibilities (municipality, traditional tourist attractions...).

- Lower attention to the environmental management of tourism businesses

Big efforts had been made in the past to improve the environmental management of tourism businesses in the CNP through the Green Tourism Scheme or the CNP Brand and probably many tourism businesses are performing well or even exemplarily, but this aspect has not been given much attention in recent years, nor it seems to be a priority in the following years. Promoting private tourism businesses best practices and enhancing exchange of expertise is essential to progress towards a sustainable tourism destination.

- Lack of participation in the Charter Network

The CNPA has limited or nonexistent participation in the Charter Network activities (charter newsletter, charter meetings, joint projects, etc.) that enables promotion and exchange of best practices.

- **Conclusions and recommendations for the Charter area:**

Please set out briefly your main conclusions and recommendations that you wish to draw to the attention of the protected area

Regarding all the information given in this report, the main conclusion is that the CNP is working and progressing satisfactorily towards sustainable tourism and implementing the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In fact, there are some examples of excellence that should be disseminated among the Charter Network.

However, there is always place for improvement so I suggest the following recommendations:

- Reduce impact of visitors to vulnerable species

Although this need is identified and addressed by the CNPPP and the Conservation Strategy, it is worthy to point it out here and to take it into account in the delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. It is a main issue for tourism sustainability and for the status of the CNP as an outstanding nature travel destination.

It is recommended to pay attention and undertake some clear and effective measures to reduce impact of visitors to vulnerable species as ground nesting birds. This could be tackle for example by:

- o Providing good and clear information about when and how to access responsibly to certain sensitive areas,
- o More and better communication of the responsible outdoor code, especially to the foreign visitors, making it easy and attractive.

However, it would be essential to involve rangers, front-line staff of tourism businesses and visitors centres to provide effective information and raise awareness of visitors.

- Deal with illegal raptors persecution

It is essential to identify and implement efficient measures to reduce raptor persecution that is affecting the reputation of the CNP as an outstanding and sustainable nature travel destination.

- Active and effective management of high visitors flows

Active management of high visitors affluence to Glenmore is needed to reduce parking problems, impacts and to improve visitors experience and nature conservation.

There is a strategy with clear objectives (Cairngorm&Glenmore Strategy) but effective measures are needed to improve public transport, limit the parking zones and finally reduce the amount of visitors arriving in certain times by private cars.

- Greater effort to improve knowledge about the CNP by tourism professionals

Good visitor infrastructures and information materials and campaigns have been developed, so now it is recommended to make a higher investment in training tourism professionals to provide them a deeper knowledge about the National Park as a whole (nature and culture values, tourism attractions, businesses, responsible access, etc.). This could be targeted to individuals working or willing to work in tourism businesses, visitor centres, local entities, etc. It has been successful in other

Charter Parks to develop specific and comprehensive training courses combining theory and practice, with onsite visits and activities that increases motivation and experience exchange. A singular recognition by the CNPA to the professionals participating in these courses could be offered.

- Enhancement of sustainable management by tourism businesses

Big efforts have been made in the past to promote sustainable management in tourism businesses through different schemes (Green Tourism Schemes, CNP Brand) and there probably are an important amount of businesses implementing effective measures.

A sustainable tourism destination cannot be so without the commitment and active involvement of the private tourism businesses, so it is recommended to identify, recognize, monitor and promote sustainable best practices of tourism businesses in the CNP, paying attention to environmental management (energy efficiency, water saving, waste management, waste reduction and management....), information about the CNP, contribution to nature and culture conservation, and support to local development (local products, providers, etc.).

It would be useful to use existing schemes as the Green Business Scheme or the Quality Scheme of Visit Scotland or building a stronger link between the CNPA and the most committed and sustainable businesses through the Charter Part II – that can be adapted to the Cairngorms reality and the Make It Yours program.

It would be needed afterwards a consistent communication campaign about those businesses, their commitment and best practices.

- Visitor giving scheme to maintain infrastructures and contribute to conservation

The CNP have a very good network of paths that is being constantly improved, but there is uncertainty of availability of funds – especially public ones – to maintain the network in the future. On the other hand, there is also a need of conservation activities and projects to maintain the status and level of attraction of the national park as a nature and outdoor activity destination.

Nowadays, the park is receiving almost 1.7 million visitors per year, these visitors could contribute to the conservation and maintenance of the National Park. Most of them would probably be glad to make a contribution to the singular place they have enjoyed so much. The challenge here is to design a visitor-friendly scheme, with low administrative costs and high transparency; where tourism businesses and local entities should be actively involved.

- Participation in the European Charter Network

The European Charter Network now counts with 157 sustainable destinations (protected areas) from 19 countries and it is a good opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices or even to promote CNP among a wide, international, specialized and committed network of professionals (protected areas managers, tourism businesses, public administrations, etc.). Every Charter Park has a lot to offer to the network and can take advantage of the experiences from other parks.

I therefore recommend that the CNPA make an effort to participate in the available tools of the network: Charter Newsletters, social media, charter meetings, joint projects and publications, working groups, etc. The network is a good school for protected areas managers aiming to progress on sustainable tourism.

The CNPA could also contribute as part of the network to make the Charter more visible and valued by the local stakeholders and the general public.

Recommendation on re-award of the Charter:

You are asked below to give your recommendation on the re-award of the Charter. Please indicate here any clarification or qualification that you may wish to make concerning your recommendation, including any suggested conditions relating to the award.

Please check one box

- I recommend that the protected area be re-awarded the Charter.
- I do not recommend that the protected area be re-awarded the Charter.

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

- A.1 Has full and clear factual information been supplied by the Charter area in answer to sections A1 – A15 of the Application Report framework? 3**

Yes

- A.2 Additional/amended information not contained in the protected area's application:**

The park has provided an important set of documents not contained in the application.

- A.3 Any information not available, and reasons for this:**

No

- A.4 Are you satisfied that the information supplied is accurate? 3**

Yes

- A.5 Are there any factual issues that might affect the eligibility of the protected area for re-award of the Charter?**

No

SECTION B – Sustainable Tourism FORUM

- B.1 Is there a permanent stakeholder structure, with a defined membership, that enables the protected-area authority to work with others on the development and management of tourism, including in taking decisions and implementing and reviewing the strategy? 3**

Yes, the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP).

Briefly describe this structure, including size and membership, frequency of meetings, responsibility, functions etc. Please identify, and distinguish between:

- Any Executive Committee/Working Group – e.g. responsible for delivery of the action plan***
- Any wider structure – e.g. enabling wider stakeholder engagement and communication***

The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) is formed by representatives of 17 entities involved in tourism development and promotion:

- private sector and NGOs (businesses association, land managers, distilleries, visitor centres, conservationists),

- destination management organisations and public sector (the park, councils, public enterprises, etc.).

The CTP developed the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and enhance, oversee and monitor its implementation. This body is also the link with the National Tourism Strategy and between public and private sectors.

The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership meets twice a year. A sub-group of the Partnership, the CTP Delivery Group also meets twice a year to progress delivery of the actions.

It is an effective structure of collaboration, participation and planning, where main public and private stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism development are represented and with appropriate linkage to other participation structures through its members.

How has this forum developed or changed over the past five years (in terms of its work, membership and the stakeholders within it)?

In 2005 it was created the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum (CSTF) to meet the Charter requirements. **The CSTF worked well in its early days however latterly the structure was found to be a bit lacking; being too public sector and strategy focused without effective buy-in or delivery.**

In 2014 the CTP was founded with less public representatives and wider objectives, role and links.

B.2 Are local tourism enterprises involved?

2

Yes, the local tourism enterprises are represented in the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) mainly by the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) that has already more than 350 members (around 65% tourism businesses). There are also other big businesses participating directly in the CTP (Distillery, amusement park, shopping centre, etc.).

Tourism businesses are also represented by the 2 Destination Management Organisations that are members of the CTP: Moray Speyside and VisitAberdeenshire.

Please describe how the Charter area has progressed and strengthened relationships with local businesses:

The relationships of the Cairngorms National Park Authority with local businesses has been strengthened through:

- Participation in the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP).
- Provision of financial support to the CBP to undertake surveys, promotional activities, etc.
- The Park Brand and the Make it Yours campaign.

Have any schemes been set up to link businesses more closely with the Charter area/Charter implementation?

Such schemes are not obligatory for re-award of the Charter

The main scheme is the CNP Brand, developed in 2004. Previously they had to fulfil a set of requirements, but nowadays the businesses and other entities that want to use the Brand just have to sign a Brand Charter with some commitments regarding the proper use of the brand, sustainability and quality. There are around 140 CNP Brand Charter Holders.

With the Make It Yours Campaign the CNPA has visited different businesses to make an inspiring and useful presentation about the Park, its values and how to make the best of it, as well as to provide them with branding materials and park information.

B.3 Has involvement of the following key groups progressed satisfactorily over the past five years?

Yes. The CNP works always in partnership with the local stakeholders (businesses, local governments, local community, landowners, conservation interests, etc.).

To draw up and implement the CNP Partnership Plan the CNPA leads the following participation groups and forums:

- Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group
- Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group
- Cairngorms Tourism Partnership
- Farming Network
- Inclusive Cairngorms
- Land Management Network
- Local Outdoor Access Forum

And supports other groups:

- Cairngorms Economic Forum
- Cairngorms Community Broadband Project Working Group
- The Association of Cairngorms Communities

Some of these groups work in the implementation of specific objectives and actions related to the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, specially Inclusive Cairngorms, the Local Outdoor Access Forum and the Cairngorms Economic Forum.

NOTE: In the following questions is just the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership that is evaluated, although it should be taken into account that there are effective and strong links with other groups and forums where there are representatives of all relevant stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership invites specific additional interests to attend individual meetings when appropriate.

B.4 Local government?

1

The CTP has no specific member representing communities, and such links are now made separately by CNPA staff.

In the previous Sustainable Tourism Forum there was a representative from the Association of Cairngorms Communities, but it is difficult that one person can adequately represent the range of communities in such a large area.

The local governments are participating in other groups and forums and the main link is the CNPA.

B.5 The local community? (e.g civil society bodies, interest groups etc.)?

1

A major landowner within the Park is a member of the CTP.
There are no other specific members representing civil society bodies, interest groups, etc.

The local community is participating in other groups, forums and consultation processes.

B.6 Conservation interests?

2

Yes. There is a representative of the Royal Society for Protection of Birds and the CNPA is also a member.

B.7 Wider (regional) bodies responsible for tourism, conservation and regional development?

2

Yes. 2 enterprise agencies are members, VisitScotland and Highland Council, their largest regional authority.

[The national conservation agency is Scottish Natural Heritage, who do not have staff resources to participate directly and appropriate linkages are provided by CNPA staff.](#)

B.8 Any other key groups (please state which), either within or outside the formal partnership structure described above, which have been actively involved?

X

SECTION C - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

PREVIOUS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - Implementation over the past 5 years

C.1 Overall comment on the progress of the Charter area towards excellence in sustainable tourism, bearing in mind where it started from five years ago

See “Overall comment on the progress of the Charter area and its partners over the past five years” in page 5.

We have seen increased visitor numbers, longer stays, better spread of visitors throughout the year and higher visitor satisfaction levels. There is greater visitor awareness of the National Park and paid membership of the Cairngorms Business Partnership is at a record high.

C.2 Could all of the planned actions be implemented? If not, how much of the action plan was implemented (estimate)?

Of the 61 actions in the 2011-16 action plan, only one was not implemented. (Action 6g:)

In all the other actions there have been some progress. Some of the actions, due to their difficulty of implementation just achieved little progress (visitor giving scheme, increase of public transport...).

C.3 Main reason for the Charter area not being able to complete the full programme (if applicable)?

They agreed that action 6g “Integrate country sports into the broader tourism offer” was not a priority. Work in this sector is now being taken forward by the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group at a national level.

C.4 What are the most positive achievements in your view?

The most positive achievements in my view are:

- The consolidation of the Cairngorms Business Partnership and the Cairngorm Tourism Partnership.
- The improvement of outdoor access facilities and infrastructures.
- The improvement on communication, information and interpretation materials and tools.
- The increased engagement of tourism businesses, other local stakeholders and visitors with the National Park, due to the use of the Park Brand and the Make it Yours Campaign.
- The establishment of clear objectives, strategies and projects to enhance sustainable tourism in two different areas of the park: Cairngorm & Glenmore (visitor management) and Tomintoul & Glenlivet (rural development).
- The development and implementation of a Regional Marketing Strategy for the Cairngorms National Park, leaded by VisitScotland and supported by the CNPA and the CTP.

C.5 What are the main challenges still faced?

The park considers that the largest single challenge that they face in the next 5 years is the development of an engaging and effective visitor giving programme, supported by the tourism industry, that generates sufficient funds to maintain infrastructure and improve nature. Due to the progressive reduction of public funds.

As I view it, there are also other challenges:

- Higher engagement with the Park of certain entities (private and public).
- More public and private entities should obtain deeper knowledge about the CNP so that they can provide better information about the Park as a whole to visitors.

- Continue improving the distribution of visitors in regards to time and space.
- Move towards a low-carbon economy with the involvement of public and private entities (sustainable transport, renewable energy, energy efficiency....).

C.6 Has the Charter area monitored the results of its action plan over the past five years? 2

Yes, there has been an update of the delivery of the actions of the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2011-2016 and a monitoring report about the achievement of the main objectives based on data from the Visitor Survey and the annual reports of the STEAM Model (a national tourism economic impact modelling process).

C.7 Have the specific recommendations made by the verifier and Evaluation Committee at original evaluation 5 years ago been addressed? 2

Please list the recommendations and give a score for each:

- “**CNPA must ensure that the CBP remains a key partner in areas such as marketing and training and in developing the Cairngorms Marketing Framework alongside the delivery of the 2011-15 Sustainable Tourism Strategy.”** 3

The CBP remain a key partner. They have had a lead role in development of the Cairngorms Economic Strategy, management of the Cairngorms Economic Forum, destination marketing, business engagement and the Business Barometer.

- “**The strong linkages between CNPA and CBP must be used to start a conversation around how the Cairngorms can become a high quality and sustainable destination within a low-carbon economy. Higher costs of oil will present real challenges and diversity of views for much of the ‘conversation’ will be around transport, its interconnectivity and how customers arrive.”** 2

Public transport provision remains an issue within the area and it is difficult to solve. Some actions have been implemented to encourage “active travel”, mainly walking and cycling once in the destination.

The Policy 3.3 of the CNPPP is to “Support development of a low carbon economy”.

- “**Co-ordination and retention of ‘buy-in’ from national public-sector organisations, who have staff working on diverse issues and projects within the Park, is a major challenge, as is the ‘churn’ of business folk. Perhaps a simple ‘sustainable tourism story’, explanation or training about the past journey and the agreed destination of travel (for public sector and for new business people) to understand how they can get involved and contribute may be helpful eg. to ‘walk the talk’.”** 2

We produced a simple summary of our work on tourism in the context of the National Tourism Strategy, Tourism 2020, which was developed by the business-led Scottish Tourism Alliance. This has been really useful in explaining our role in delivery of the strategy to public sector partners at a national level.

- “**Building on the point above – raising awareness and understanding for all staff and members of the CNPA of the principles of sustainable tourism and the approach taken in the Cairngorms is very important. The Cairngorms has an interesting model with excellence in outcomes and this needs to be understood**

within CNPA and then it can be shared locally, nationally and internationally.”

2

Some training for staff has been developed including the “Make it Yours” program, to encourage understanding of businesses engagement. But it seems that it hs not included a wider view of the Sustainable Tourism principles.

CNP best practised has been shared mainly nationally through the UK national Park’s tourism group. Less spread has been made internationally, for example using the Europarc Charter Network tools (newsletters, conferences, etc.).

- “***To achieve a cohesive and functioning community, CNPA must work with partners and stakeholders in four key socio-economic areas: (i) Broadband; (ii) Transport links; (iii) Housing and; (iv) Jobs.***” **2**

These are main issues for the CNP that need long term strategies. Anyway, some progress has been made during the last years in broadband coverage, housing and jobs. The National Park Partnership Plan includes new actions and projects to address these main issues.

- “***More imagination & creativity is required during the next 5 years to really progress and generate support through ‘Payback Schemes’ from visitors and businesses so that tangible contributions can be seen – perhaps new technologies such as phone apps (eg. Text ‘Yes’ £5) could be embraced***” **1**

There is one scheme functioning in the territory: the “Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust”, a charity organization that gathers funds to maintain and improve the paths and promote sustainable public access. It has been also created the “Cairngorm Trust” [a registered charity that can accept donations and legacies, and have received funding to employ a volunteer co-ordinator from 2016-19 to develop environmental volunteering.](#)

However, establishing a visitor giving scheme is one of the main objectives and challenges for the next five years.

- “***The new Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is weak on activities for economically disadvantaged people. Perhaps this is worth looking at again.***”

2

Low cost tourist attractions and activities are promoted (‘Cairngorms on a Shoestring’ section) and some singular events have been developed targeted to this group of people. Anyway, the number of this kind of visitors has dropped and specific objectives and actions have been defined for the next 5 years to tackle this issue. [Increasing the proportion of these lower-income visitors is a priority in the CNPA Equalities Action Plan 2017-2020.](#)

- “***More should be made of the Charter as the premier European quality label for sustainable tourism in protected areas. Perhaps in collaborating with EUROPARC to connect customers/visitors easily to sustainable destinations. Eg. A guide to Protected Areas and companies awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – how to get there sustainably and what to day/stay/eat etc.”*** **1**

We don’t feel that the Charter works particularly well as a consumer-facing brand at present. We have focussed on building the brand of the Cairngorms National Park The park uses the Charter mainly as a useful tool for planning and as a recognition of the proper management of sustainable tourism.

- “*An easy, integrated method of making reservations to and in the Cairngorms for accommodation, activities, rail and bus travel should be developed. Also action to upgrade and secure modern rail sleeper services should be a priority if the concept of a ‘sustainable destination’ is to be realised.*” **2**

This kind of method has not been developed. The CBP website, www.visitcairngorms.com is the key portal for information about the National Park. While it doesn't contain a booking engine, it does include information on packages and inclusive holidays, links to transport information and an 'accommodation finder' enquiry page that allows potential visitors to contact multiple providers with details of their requirements.

In terms of sleeper travel, the contract for the Caledonian Sleeper service was awarded to Serco who took over in 2015 and plan to make a major investment in new carriages which should running from April 2018.

C.8 Were the envisaged financial resources available for the implementation, and where they sufficient?

Yes, and even additional external funds were brought for several large projects (more than £7 million).

C.9 Have there been changes in staffing levels, both in the protected area generally and in the staff dealing with tourism issues, over the past five years? Has the level of staffing affected implementation of the action plan?

The CNPA has been restructured several times during the last 5 years, most recently in December 2016. In general, staff numbers have remained relatively constant and have not impacted on successful delivery of the action plan.

NEW STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - Plans for the next five years

Revision of strategy, new action plan

C.10 Has the tourism strategy been revised for the next five years?

3

Yes

C.11 Has a new action plan been prepared for the Charter area and its partners?

3

Yes, the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (CNPPP) 2017-2022 and the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan for the Cairngorms National Park (STAP) 2017-2022 have been prepared.

C.12 How are the strategy and new action plan presented (in terms of documents)?
Please comment briefly on the strategy/plan documentation (e.g. level of detail etc.)

The CNPPP 2017-2022 is the overall management plan of the park, structured in 3 main outcomes: conservation, visitor experience and rural development, and 9 priorities. It provides strategic direction for five key strategies and plans that are also developed through close partnership with different stakeholders:

- Active Cairngorms
- Cairngorms Nature
- Economic Strategy
- Local Development Plan
- LEADER Local Development Strategy.

The STAP 2017-2022 is a separate document prepared by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) (See B1). The Plan establishes the main goals and its indicators, priority themes, actions and delivery partners.

The actions are organised in the following themes:

- Leadership
- Skills
- Enhance our assets
- Engage and inspire
- International

There are lead partners that are responsible to develop and oversee a delivery plan for each action with the support of the CNPA:

The CTP decided to make it short, concise and clear to involve businesses (8 pages).

C.13 How does the tourism strategy relate to the protected-area management plan?

The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2017-2022 is an overarching management plan for the National Park.

"The Partnership Plan provides the strategic context for the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and forms the basis for the Park's chartered status under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas" (quoted from the CNPPP).

The Tourism Action Plan establishes the main goals according to the outcomes defined by the CNPPP: conservation, visitor experience and rural development.

C.14 Are there any apparent contradictions between tourism and protected-area management objectives and actions?

No, both plans seem to be perfectly coherent, connected and coordinated.

C.15 What process has been used to review/revise the strategy and develop the new action plan and how have local stakeholders been involved?

Please describe briefly the process, making reference to the role of the stakeholder structures described under Question B.1, as appropriate.

The Park developed a consistent consultation process in 2016 for the review and the development of the new CNP Partnership Plan, using different tools to discuss the "9 big issues" from June to September:

- Meetings of the existing forums, groups and committees.
- Events (Seminars, Shows...)
- Specific survey sent to local authorities, other public bodies, NGOS/voluntary organisations, land owners/managers, business interests/private, businesses, community organisations, private individuals. (319 responses)

The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP) has been involved in the development of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP):

- May 2016: discussion about submitting the CNP Partnership Plan for the Charter Re-Evaluation.
- September 2016: CTP delivery group meeting focussed on the STAP.
- October 2016: CTP meeting focused on the detail of the STAP.

C.16 Was there wider consultation with local tourism enterprises in preparing the revised strategy/action plan?

Yes, through the wider consultation process for the CNPPP.

C17 Was there wider consultation with the local community and other interests/stakeholders in preparing the revised strategy/action plan?

Yes, through the wider consultation process for the CNPPP.

C.18 Has there been any further assessment of natural and cultural resources, their sensitivities (capacity) and opportunities for tourism? 3

Yes.

A thorough CNPPP Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of the development for CNPPP. See also CNPPP Issues Reports Landscape Scale Conservation, Deer & Moorland Management and Flood Management.

C.19 Has there been any further assessment of visitor patterns and needs? 3

Yes, the Park develops every 5 years a Visitor Survey. The Visitor Survey Report for the period May 2014-April 2015 is very complete and it was used as a base for the review of the Strategy.

C.20 Has there been any further assessment of future visitor markets offering potential? 3

Yes.

As part of development of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and associated Cairngorms Marketing Strategy on the basis of STEAM data, Cairngorms Visitor Survey data and VisiScotland segmentation.

Implementation

C.21 Does the new action plan include an indication of phasing/staging of action over time? 0

No

The actions are worded at a headline level and will each require a variety of sub-actions over the course of the next 5 years.

This applies to both plans, the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and the CNP Partnership Plan.

C.22 Does the action plan indicate the relevant stakeholders or partners for each action? 2

Yes.

The CNP Partnership Plan establishes a framework for every main aim, identifying delivery partnerships and delivery organisations. It is suppose that the coordinating partner will be the CNPA and there will be specific projects and programs to implement the strategy where the lead entity and partners will be identified.

The Sustainable Tourism Action Plan indicate the lead partner for each action.

C.23 What is the approximate size of the budget that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the new action plan per year, excluding staff costs?

Neither the CNP Partnership Plan nor the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan have any budget allocated already. This level of detail is defined when specific projects are developed.

C.24 What is this approximately as a percentage of its total budget?

There is no information about this.

C.25 Have funds been provided (or are they being sought) from other sources?

Yes. For example:

- Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership Project has received £2.34million from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Cairngorms Business Partnership will receive £197 000 from Scottish Enterprise for development of the Snow Road Scenic Route.

C.26 Do you judge the level of funding already secured/applied for to be sufficient to meet the action proposed? x

The level of funding foreseen and secured is defined in a project by project basis.

The Park Authority budget will remain similar for the year 2017/18 what will ensure proper leading and monitoring.

C.27 What is the staffing that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan?

The Park will devote for the implementation of the CNP Partnership Plan its core staff (67 staff (60 full time equivalent posts)). It is not estimated for the STAP.

C.28 Is staffing being provided from other sources?

This is not defined in detail, but the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan will be led by different partnerships and organizations. The CNPPP will be also implemented by different groups and entities of the territory.

C.29 Do you believe the action proposed can be implemented with this level of staffing?

Taking into account the results obtained in previous periods, even if the level of human resources to be devoted is not defined, it seems that the resources needed for the next period will be provided, by the Park and the partner entities.

C.30 Is there a good indication of commitment from partners/stakeholders to implementing the new action plan? 2

Yes. Members of the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership are committed to the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP), and the different forums and groups are committed to develop the CNP Partnership Plan (CNPPP).

C.31 Does the Charter area have any formal arrangements with partners for implementation of this action plan?

No for these Plans in particular (CNPPP and STAP).

C.32 Has a process been put in place for monitoring and reporting on progress with the implementation of the Action Plan? 3

Yes

Progress on delivery of the STAP will take place twice a year at the CTP delivery group meetings, with updates also being available to the wider CTP.

"Progress in delivering the Partnership Plan will be monitored through the production of an annual monitoring report, which will outline delivery against the targets and indicators in the plan. A partnership meeting of key organisations will also be held each year to co-ordinate delivery actions, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board will receive six monthly progress updates." (Quoted from the CNPPP)

C.33 Have indicators been identified for the impact/success of the strategy and action plan, including how these will be monitored? 3

Yes.

Headline indicators have been included in the STAP, with wider monitoring being undertaken around the NPPP.

The CNPPP establishes indicators for every target in the delivery frameworks for conservation, visitor experience and rural development.

SECTION D – ADDRESSING THE KEY TOPICS

Please indicate below:

- [A] The level of current activity
- [B] Progress over past five years – including in implementing of the previous action plan
- [C] Level of planned activity in the new plan

Please provide brief comments of explanation, as indicated in at the start of this form.

D1 Protecting valuable landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage

D1.1 Influencing land use planning and the control of potentially damaging developments A [3] B [3] C [3]

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is the Planning Authority for the CNP with responsibility for developing Local Development Plans and with powers to 'Call-In' planning applications that will have a significant effect on the aims of the CNP.

A new Local Development Plan came into force in 2015 and will guide development until 2020.

D1.2 Influencing the location, type and design of tourism developments

A [3] B [3] C [3]

This is driven by the Planning Responsibilities of the CNPA and the Local Development Plan (LDP) that establishes a Policy to support Tourism Development if it has no adverse environmental impacts on the site or neighbouring areas.

The LDP and the CNPPP include among the policies to implement sustainable patterns of settlement development.

D1.3 Managing visitor flows, activities and behaviour in sensitive areas and sites

A [2] B [2] C [2]

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone rights of access over land and inland water throughout Scotland, subject to specific exclusions set out in the Act and as long as they behave responsibly. How to behave is defined in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Therefore there are no strict regulations regarding activities in sensitive areas and sites. This is usually addressed by:

- participation (Outdoor Access Forum, Cairngorms Tourism Partnership),
- planning and improving outdoor access infrastructures (Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan, Outdoor Access Strategy – Active Cairngorms)
- information about responsible access and rising awareness about sensitive areas. (E.g. Tread Lightly Campaign)

In particular,

- the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy (2016) establishes clear targets and actions to manage visitor flows in the most visited areas,
- the Capercaillie Framework aims to secure the future of the Capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park, based on good knowledge to guide active management,
- specific campaigns have been developed to improve responsible behaviour of people with dogs, one of the main threats for ground nesting birds and other wildlife species.

These activities and tools will be maintained and developed in the next five years. However, there is still a problem and a risk of disturbances of ground-nesting-birds and other sensitive species in some popular recreational areas.

D2 Supporting conservation through tourism

D2.1 Encouraging visitors and tourism businesses to support conservation, through donations, volunteering and other activity A 2 B 2 C 3

Visitors contribute by car parking and other smaller schemes to the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust to develop projects including environmental volunteering.

A volunteering co-ordinator in the CNPA has been appointed for 2016-2019 to develop our work in this area.

A wider Cairngorms Trust has been established as a registered charity to accept donations. This is the first step to “develop an approach to enable businesses, visitors, and communities to engage in the management and maintenance of the natural assets and visitor infrastructure through interpretation, volunteering opportunities and donations.” (Action 7 of the STAP).

D2.2 Using revenues obtained from tourism-related activity to support conservation

A 2 B 2 C 3

Some local businesses individually support local projects but not as part of a wider Park-wide project.

It would be interesting to compile and disseminate these initiatives.

It is planned that tourism businesses also collaborate and contribute to the scheme mentioned in D2.1.

D2.3 Establishing, supporting and promoting tourism-related investments, projects and activities that help to conserve the natural and cultural heritage

A 2 B 2 C 2

Funding support has been given to ranger services (conservation, visitor information and services...), cultural events, visitors infrastructures, etc.

Same kind of support is foreseen in the next years.

D3 Reducing carbon footprint, pollution and wasteful resource use

D3.1 Working with tourism businesses to improve environmental management, including use of energy and water, waste management, and noise and light pollution A 1 B 1 C 1

The Park used to encourage membership of the Green Tourism Scheme through seminars and as a condition to use the Park Brand.

During the last period, this is not a condition anymore. The reason is that businesses are not interested in membership of quality/sustainability schemes anymore and the main aim of the CNPA is to involve as many partners as possible to use the brand and engage with the CNP.

To use the Park Brand it is only needed to sign the Cairngorms Brand Charter, which confirms the commitment to help promote the best the National Park can offer and deliver high quality, sustainable and authentic experiences, products and services. The CNPA developed some guidelines on how to do this.

As a result there has been a lower emphasis on tourism businesses to implement sustainable management practices.

On the other hand, Visit Scotland has included a sustainable review for the businesses applying to its Quality Assurance Scheme, and further recommendations and advise is given afterwards. They have good information materials about sustainable practices specific for every kind of tourism business. But it seems that there are not minimum sustainability requirements.

There are no specific actions regarding this issue in the next five years. However one of the policies of the CNPPP (Policy 3.3) is to support development of a low carbon economy, with a particular focus on: a) increasing renewable energy generation, and b) supporting businesses and communities to use less energy, reduce emissions, improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings, generate low impact renewable energy, reduce, reuse and recycle resource.

D3.2 Promoting the use of public transport and other alternatives to cars

A 2 B 2 C 2

As a large Park with a low-density of residents & visitors, public transport remains an issue, and our work in this area has focused around the 'active travel' agenda, encouraging travel on foot and by bike though investment in off-road paths and an electric bike network.

There are several options to access the park by public transport (train, bus, ...), and there was an interesting publication informing about the public transport services in the whole CNP and encouraging visitors to get out of their the car, the "Cairngorms Explorer" leaflet, but the last version is 2014-2015.

The Outdoor Access Strategy – Active cairngorms and the CNPPP 2017-2022 include promoting active travel and public transport provision and reducing private motor vehicles (visitors and inhabitants).

It is foreseen an important investment to improve the service of the Caledonian Sleeper and a marketing project with the Cairngorms Business Partnership to attract visitors from the South of England.

In the Cairngorm & Glenmore Strategy it is foreseen a "feasibility study for improved public transport and park and ride approach".

D4 Providing safe access, quality facilities and special experiences of the protected area, available for all visitors

D4.1 Providing a wide range of access opportunities, with attention to safety and risk management A 3 B 3 C 3

CNP has an important and well maintained path network, that has been enhanced and improved during the last five years:

- Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) awarded £5 million Heritage Lottery bid (jointly with Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park) to upgrade all the main mountain paths in the Cairngorms.
- CNPA have extended the Speyside Way long-distance route from Aviemore to Kincraig.
- Seventeen easy to read community path leaflets produced (covering the whole National Park) and two easy access guides (covering the whole National Park) detailing accessible routes produced.
- 'Active Cairngorms' outdoor access strategy approved in 2015
- Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan approved in 2015 (more than 1.000 km of paths that offer a wide range of high quality outdoor access opportunities).

Planned activities:

- Implement 'Active Cairngorms' outdoor access strategy:
 - o Support Land Managers to deliver recreational management plans
 - o Develop and promote ranger events programme
- Partnership with Outdoor Access trust for Scotland
- [Further extension of the Speyside Way to Kingussie](#)
- [Ambition to also extend the Deeside Way to Braemar.](#)

D4.2 Improving the quality of visitor facilities and services

A **3** B **3** C **3**

Different actions have been developed to improve visitors facilities and services in the CNP:

- Path network (improvement and maintenance) see D4.1
- Visitors Centres (refurbishing and information about the CNP)
- Support and monitor ranger services and activities for visitors.

Planned activities:

- Pilot "Total Quality Destination Approach" will be developed by VisitScotland to evaluate visitor infrastructures and services and identify opportunities for investment to enhance visitor experience.
- Path network (improvement and maintenance) See D4.1.
- Implement 'Active Cairngorms' outdoor access strategy. See D4.1
- Reconstruction and improvement of Ballater Visitor Information Centre.

D4.3 Providing visitors with specific tourism offers which involve discovery, interpretation and appreciation of the area's special natural and cultural heritage

A **2** B **2** C **3**

Conservation organizations and ranger services offer specialised activities for visitors and inhabitants to discover natural values and a number of leading Scottish wildlife tour companies are now based in the CNP and are actively involved in the CTP.

There is a strong cultural offering in the CNP both in terms of built heritage and the heritage of the people. Some actions developed through the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Project includes activities to enhance the discovery of cultural heritage for visitors. The “Make it yours” program aims to encourage this kind of activities.

Planned activities:

- Continue to roll out the ‘Make it Yours’ project to other organisations, and develop more support materials to enable businesses to engage customers with the National Park.
- Use of the guide “Sharing the Stories of the Cairngorms National Park: A guide to interpreting the area’s distinct character and coherent identity”
- Developing and enhancing key strategic assets and working to turn these assets into outstanding visitor experiences (*Action 6 – Sustainable Tourism Action plan*) with a focus on:
 - o Roads: Snow Roads Scenic Route and A9
 - o Paths: Speyside Way and Deeside Way
 - o Areas: Cairngorm & Glenmore and Tomintoul & Glenlivet
 - o Activities: Cycling and Low Level Walking
- Turning assets into experiences. Develop package experiences around long distance roads, cultural tourism and wildlife &Adventure tourism, Events & Festivals (among others, Action 1.2 of the Economic Strategy 2015-2018)

D4.4 Providing facilities and information for visitors with special needs

A 2 B 2 C 2

Developed activities:

- Visitor satisfaction amongst visitors with a disability was higher than average (Visitor Survey)
- An Accessible Tourism business event was organised by CBP in 2016 to encourage businesses to think about, and cater to, this group of visitors.
- Path development has focused on barrier-free access.
- Specific leaflet of the “Paths with Easy Access”

Planned activities:

- The CNPPP establishes as one of the 6 priorities “Learning and inclusion” (6), and in its agenda for actions, specifically:
 - o e) Creating a ‘Park for All’ by reducing barriers and inspiring a diversity of people to engage with and care for their National Park through lifelong learning;
 - o f) Using volunteering and physical activity to promote learning and inclusion.
- Community path leaflets will be upgraded to show new path grading system, making it easier for visitors to choose a path that meets their needs and abilities.
- VisitScotland’s Accessible Tourism project , has just developed a template for access statements and local businesses will be encouraged to complete these. There is an on-line Accessible Tourism Training Programme.

D5 Effectively communicating the area to visitors

D5.1 Ensuring that marketing materials and activities promote the area effectively and responsibly

A **3** B **3** C **3**

The Cairngorms Business Partnership have taken the lead role in marketing the CNP supported by CNPA and Visit Scotland.

Visit Scotland has worked in a collaborative marketing campaign with CNPA and CBB in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017.

The collaboration has ended in the Cairngorms National Park Regional Marketing Strategy (CNPRMS) and the involvement of the CNPA ensures responsibly marketing, mainly focussed in spreading visitors in time and space.

It is foreseen to continue in the next 5 years the collaborative approach to define and implement the SNPRMS with the aim to target the longer-stay, higher-spending international markets.

D5.2 Providing good quality and effective visitor information and interpretation

A **2** B **2** C **2**

The main web pages about the CNP have been considerably improved in the last 5 years:

- The CBP manages the main business website for the National Park,:
<http://visitcairngorms.com/>
- The CNPA has improved visitor-related content in its official webpage:
<http://cairngorms.co.uk/>

Some information materials have been developed as well as there is now more information about the CNP in the Visitor Information Centres and in some private assets. The CNPA work with the ranger services to improve visitor information and interpretation in their activities.

Planned activities:

- Develop the Cairngorms National Park as an integral part of the 'iKnow Scotland' initiative both at a local, regional, and national level and deliver an effective network of visitor information points and targeted marketing activity based on the Cairngorms National Park Regional Marketing Strategy (Action 9, Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Action Plan)
- Develop a 'dogs welcome' package for the Park including web resources publications and identified dog walking areas. (Action 9, Active Cairngorms Strategy)

It would be advisable to make a bigger effort to train individuals and tourism professionals, especially those working in tourism businesses, visitors centres, rangers and local communities, about the CNP as a whole. This will provide better information and interpretation to visitors.

D5.3 Ensuring that tourism businesses and other local stakeholders are well informed about the area and provide relevant and accurate information to visitors A **3 B **3*** C **3****

Important efforts have been done in this matter and some best practice have been developed:

* **CNP Brand** (<http://cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/advice-guidelines/the-park-brand/>) The brand was developed in 2004 to provide a strong identity for the National Park, and to engage local stakeholders. Nowadays there are around 150 Brand holders. Although the requirements to hold it are lower now, there has been an effort with the Make it Yours Campaign to encourage brand users to connect more meaningfully to the Park. A new bi-lingual Gaelic brand has also been approved and the brand guidelines are under review. Collaborative marketing activity with CBP, CNPA and VS is being undertaken to raise the profile of the brand.

* **Make it Yours' project** has encouraged front-line tourism staff to have a better understanding and awareness of the National Park. Within the framework of this project the CNPA have develop materials (briefing packs, video-presentation, "Sales Pitch" messages, branded pins, tear-off map, set of path leaflets, ...), communication activities, and on-site presentations for tourism businesses staff (training delivered to 126 individuals from over 15 businesses/organisations).

(<http://visitcairngorms.com/makeityours>)

* **Communicating Cairngorms** (<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/communicating/>)

Communicating Cairngorms is an online tool kit that aims to help anyone in the Cairngorms National Park - or with an interest in the Park - talk or write about their life, work, play in the Cairngorms in a clear and consistent way and with maximum effect. There is information and guidance with regards to publicity, press releases, case studies, free photos, maps, etc.

Planned activities:

- "Develop and deliver a programme of training and tools for businesses and communities to engage them with the National Park as a brand and to enable them, in turn, to engage our visitors and get involved in effective and collaborative marketing activity". (Action 8, Sustainable Tourism Action Plan)
- "VisitScotland have launched an 'iKnow' product knowledge scheme, including for the Cairngorms, and CNPA will work to strengthen links with the 'Make It Yours' programme". (Action 9, Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Action Plan)
- "Support Make it Yours Campaign" (Action 9, Active Cairngorms Strategy)
- "Providing high quality coordinated information setting visitors experiences in the context of the National Park". (Policy 2.1.b) CNPPP)

D5.4 Providing specific information and interpretation for young people, schools and student groups A 3 B 3 C 3

Engagement with young people has largely been through the Europarc Junior Rangers scheme and the John Muir Award (~ 3000 awards annually). There has also been 'Teaching in Nature' training provided for 6 teachers. A travel grant to support schools and other priority groups in travelling to the CNP supported 76 groups (2,461 people) to visit the CNP in 2014 -16.

There are also specific tools and materials: the Cairngorms Learning Zone (<http://cairngormslearningzone.co.uk/>) and learning resources (<http://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/education-learning/projects-for-schools/learning-resources/>)

These schemes will be maintained.

D6 Ensuring social cohesion

D6.1 Anticipating, monitoring and minimising any existing and potential conflicts with local residents

A 3 B 3 C 3

There is a wide range of participation bodies in the National Park (groups, forums, partnerships and associations) with active participation in developing and implementing the Park planning and projects. The CNPA leads some of them and supports others.

There has been also an extensive consultation to different stakeholders and inhabitants to develop the CNPPP 2017-2022.

D6.2 Maintaining good communication and engagement between local residents, businesses, visitors and the protected area authority

A 3 B 3 C 3

Participation structures and good communications (web pages, social networks, make it yours program, visitor survey, etc.) ensures good communications and engagement between the stakeholder mentioned and with visitors.

D6.3 Encouraging and developing appropriate partnership activity with and between stakeholders A 3 B 3 C 3

See B1, B2, B3 and D6.1.

D7 Strengthening prosperity in the local community

D.7.1 Promoting the provision and identity of local produce and services and their purchase and use by visitors and tourism businesses

A 3 B 3 C 2

Cairngorms Food for Life Project, supported by LEADER funding, ran from 2011 – 2014, and included development of business-to-business and business-to-consumer food guides, support of food-related events and development of community orchards.

D7.2 Supporting the economic viability and performance of local tourism businesses and the provision of local employment in tourism A 3 B 3 C 3

An important amount of plans, projects and actions developed in the last five years (studies, infrastructures, training, marketing, etc.) have been developed to enhance economic development and in particular, the improvement of the tourism activity, one of the most important economic sectors in the CNP.

The Park Partnership Plan, the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership Project and the Cairngorms Economic Strategy will support economic viability and performance of tourism businesses.

D8 Providing training and capacity building

D8.1 Providing relevant training for staff of the protected area authority in sustainable tourism development and management

A **1** B **1** C **1**

There has not been specific training on Sustainable Tourism for staff of the CNPA, although the Director of Planning & Rural Development attended a Mountain Tourism conference in China and some relevant staff engaged in several UK National Parks' Officer's group including Sustainable Tourism, Communications, Rangers and Access to share best practise.

Planned activities:

Head of Visitor Services taking part in Destination Leadership Programme, including learning journeys in Scotland and Norway. There are also learning journeys, and attendance at international travel trade shows planned as part of the Snow Roads scenic route development.

No specific training for CNPA staff is planned.

D8.2 Providing and encouraging relevant training and capacity building for tourism businesses and other stakeholders in sustainable tourism

A **3** B **3** C **2**

Cairngorms Business Partnership and Visit Scotland have provide training events and materials for businesses.

Skills development is identified as one of 5 key themes in the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, and this will again be led by the CBP. Although there is nothing specific about sustainable tourism.

D9 Monitoring tourism performance and impacts

D9.1 Monitoring of visitors – volumes, patterns, spending and satisfaction

A **3** B **3*** C **3**

A comprehensive year-long visitor survey* was carried out for the 3rd time in 2014/15 and has provided information on visitor demographics, experience and satisfaction. The volume and value of tourism has been estimated using the STEAM model annually.

It is planned to continue developing the annual Visitor Survey.

D9.2 Monitoring of tourism businesses – performance and needs

A **3** B **3*** C **3**

Business confidence is measured through the quarterly Business Barometer*: Since 2009 the Cairngorms Business Partnership – with the support of the CNPA - develops a quarterly and annual report about business performance and insights with information provided by predominantly tourism-related businesses across the

Cairngorms National Park. This survey gathers information and assessment by businesses about customer profile, business levels and evolution, levels of investment, costs, external support, influence of Cairngorms National Park, business confidence. It is also produced an annual report of the Cairngorms Barometer accessible in www.visitcairngorms.com.

It is planned to continue supporting the Business Barometer.

D9.3 Monitoring of tourism impacts – on the environment, economy and community
A 2 B 2 C 2

Economic data is gathered through the STEAM model as above. Community impacts are monitored through the community action planning process and through the AoCC (Association of Cairngorms Communities) forum. The environmental impacts of recreation are monitored by ranger services funded by CNPA, who report through the National Reporting Form.

D9.4 Monitoring progress in implementing the action plan.
A 2 B 2 C 2

The delivery of the CNPPP is monitored through annual reports and the STAP is monitored through the CTP meetings and a mid-term review.

D10 Communicating actions and engaging with the Charter

D10.1 Communicating sustainable tourism actions and results to local stakeholders and more widely at a local, regional and national level

A 2 B 2 C 2

There is a proper communication of the sustainable actions through the participation structures, press releases, park's webpage and social networks. The CNPA and its partners develop effective summaries and infographs with the results of the Visitor Surveys and other surveys.

D10.2 Promoting and making visible the award of the Charter
A 2 B 2 C 2

We promoted award of the Charter through a press release and mailshot to businesses at the time of the award, and refer to it in the 'tourism' section of the CNPA website. We do not use the Charter in consumer marketing as we don't feel it works well as a consumer-facing brand.

There is also a reference to the Charter in the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and in the Cairngorms Partnership Plan (CNPPP).

D10.3 Engaging with EUROPARC and the Charter Network, including participating in related events and activities A 1 B 1 C 1

There has been limited interaction with the Charter Network over the last 5 years as network meetings have not been in easily accessible locations, and details have been available slightly too late to make attendance possible for us. We have not been aware of any EUROPARC Atlantic Isles events recently but do attend meetings of the UK National Parks' sustainable tourism officer's group which serves a similar role. Considered attendance at Charter Network meeting in Portugal 2015, but information was given at too short notice to make attendance feasible.

Planned actions:

There are no specific actions relating to this, but we are keen to engage with the Network where possible.

D10.4 Taking steps for re-application and renewal of the Charter.

A **2** B **3** C **2**

Although it is not planned as an action, the monitoring of the CNPPP and the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is foreseen and the process and results will be part of the re-award of the Charter. The Park is willing to re-apply in 2021.

SECTION E – EXPERIENCE AND FINAL COMMENTS

Please comment briefly on any points made by the applicant in this section which you believe are of particular interest.

E.1 Examples of excellence and best practice

Please mention briefly the best examples of excellence or best practice you have seen in this Charter area (by cross-reference to the above questions if appropriate)

- The Cairngorms Business Partnership: the CBP continues to grow and has its highest membership to date. They are also working pro-actively with neighbouring destination management organisations and are drawing in income from a wider range of sources both Public and Private sector.
- Marketing: A new Regional Marketing Strategy is now in place for the Cairngorms National Park. The Strategy has been developed by VisitScotland (VS) and in conjunction with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP). Collaborative marketing campaigns delivered with CNPA, VS and CBP.
- Make it yours: project developed to grow and develop the National Park brand as an entity beyond the brand image to raise awareness of the Park's special qualities, build the brand as an asset for businesses and create a connection to the Park so

people care about it. Presentations and materials delivered and increased number of businesses signed up to brand.

- Outdoor Access and Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) – COAT has grown and developed completing the Mountain Heritage Path project and securing £5m of funding for the Mountains and People Project. The Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore has been approved and completed as far as Kinraig. Preliminary work on extending the Deeside Way is underway. Work on upgrading, signing and promoting the community path network including 17 community path leaflets and two guides to all abilities routes.
- Food and Drink – The ‘Food For Life’ Project, with a was completed in 2014 and delivered a range of initiatives including a Cairngorms Food and Drink Trail, Cairngorms Larder, a Producers Guide, and marketing initiatives as part of the VS ‘Year of Food and Drink’ in 2015. A number of food festivals and events now take place in the CNP including the Deeside Food and Fiddle Festival.
- The Visitor Survey (See page 7 and D.9.1)
- The Business Barometer (See D.9.2)

E.2 Marketing and promotion of the Charter

Is the protected area helping to promote the Charter, e.g. in its publications, website, etc.?

See D10.2

E.3 Experience of working with the Charter – final comments

The Charter Principles are inherent to the planning and management of the CNP by the CNPA. Therefore, the Charter Award is considered useful as an external evaluation and recognition of their performance. The Park finds particularly interesting the onsite visit of the Charter Verifier every five years.

However, the CNPA does not participate actively in the Charter Network nor they perform a wide promotion of the Charter and the award in the territory. They may don't see clear benefits from that.

The Park suggested in their application report to simplify the application questionnaire that is very time-consuming to complete.