

# Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2023-28



Cairngorms  
National Park

Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



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Cover image of family with dogs on the old logging way © Rachel Keenan / Park Authority.

Contents page image of heather moorland in flower and birch woodland © Mark Hamblin.

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# Foreword

**The Cairngorms National Park is a unique and beautiful place, home to iconic landscapes, endangered species and over 18,000 people. A place where people and nature can thrive together.**

This plan for sustainable tourism within the National Park has been created during one of the most challenging and unpredictable periods of recent times. It aims to deliver key tourism priorities within the overarching framework of the newly published National Park Partnership Plan. But the plan must help us deliver against the backdrop of the climate and nature crises, the continued impacts of Covid-19 and increasing pressures on the cost of living.

In order to address these many complex challenges over the next five years we – as a Park Authority and as a tourism sector – will need to think differently. We will need to be collaborative, to embrace new ideas, and to be radical in our approach. Our commitment to sustainable tourism is crucial. Tourism can contribute to the long-term economic prosperity of the National Park’s communities, help us achieve our net zero and nature restoration targets, and underpin a wellbeing economy that works for all the National Park’s residents and visitors.

The pandemic reminded us of how effective we are when we work in partnership. The Park Authority worked with partners in every community to provide vital support to the tourism sector and all those who rely on it. We worked closely with our friends at the Cairngorms Business Partnership to create the #CairngormsTogether campaign, a framework to help businesses, communities and visitors co-exist productively in a pandemic. That tagline continues to be used to promote positive ways for everyone to enjoy the National Park.

In July 2022 the Park Authority – alongside over 700 other organisations and businesses – signed up to the Glasgow Declaration for Climate Action in Tourism, demonstrating our commitment to meeting our shared climate change responsibilities. We are acutely aware that times are tough for the tourism industry just now, but it is our firm belief that sustainable practices and a thriving economy go hand in hand within the Cairngorms National Park.

This plan sets out how we aim to do it. We know it won’t be easy and we will need to be flexible to adapt to a changing economic, political and cultural climate. But there is a real opportunity here for the Cairngorms National Park to be a place that shows the way for rural communities, both here in Scotland and across the globe. I look forward to working with you to deliver it over the next five years.



**Janet Hunter**

Deputy Convener of the  
Park Authority and Chair of  
the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership

# Ro-ràdh

**'S e àite sònraichte, brèagha a tha ann am Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh, a tha na dhachaigh do chruthan-tìre suaicheanta, gnèithean ann an cunnart agus barrachd is 18,000 daoine: àite far am faod daoine agus nàdar a bhith a' soirbheachadh còmhla.**

Chaidh am plana seo, airson turasachd sheasmhach taobh a-staigh na Pàirce Nàiseanta, a chruthachadh rè aon de na h-amannan as dùbhlaniche a tha air a bhith ann o chionn ghoirid, àm nuair nach b' urrainnear ro-innse dè dh'fhaodadh tachairt. Tha e ag amas air libhrigeadh nam prìomhachasan cudromach airson turasachd taobh a-staigh an fhrèam-obrach Plana Com-pàirteachas na Pàirce Nàiseanta, a chaidh fhoillseachadh o chionn ghoirid. Ach feumaidh am plana ar cuideachadh a libhrigeadh fa chomhair cùl-raon nan èiginnean cliomaid agus nàdair, buaidhean leantainneach Covid-19 agus cuideaman cosgais bith-beò a tha a' sìor-dhol am meud.

Airson dèiligeadh ris an iomadh dùbhlann iom-fhillte seo thairis air an ath chòig bliadhna, feumaidh sinne – mar Ùghdarras Pàirce agus mar roinn turasachd – smaointinn ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte. Feumaidh sinn a bhith co-obrachail, a' gabhail ri beachdan ùra, agus a bhith radaigeach san dòigh-obrach againn. Tha ar dealas ri turasachd sheasmhach deatamach. Faodaidh turasachd cur ri soirbheachas eaconomaigeach fad-ùine nan coimhearsnachdan sa Phàirc Nàiseanta, faodaidh i ar cuideachadh gus na targaidean againn a choileanadh a thaobh neoni lom agus ath-shlànachadh nàdair, agus faodaidh i taic a thoirt do dh'eaconamaidh sunnd a bhios ag obair airson a h-uile neach-còmhnaidh is neach-tadhail sa Phàirc Nàiseanta.

Chuimhnich an galar mòr-sgaoilte dhuinn cho èifeachdach 's a tha sinn nuair a tha sinn ag obair ann an com-pàirteachas. Dh'obair Ùghdarras na Pàirce le com-pàirtichean sa h-uile coimhearsnachd gus taic dheatamach a thoirt seachad do roinn na turasachd agus dhaibhsan a tha na eisimeil. Dh'obair sinn gu dlùth leis ar caraidean aig Com-pàirteachas Gnothachas a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh gus an iomairt #CairngormsTogether a chruthachadh, frèam-obrach gus gnothachasan, coimhearsnachdan agus luchd-tadhail a chumail a' dol ri chèile gu tarbhach ann an galar mòr-sgaoilte. Tha an abairt shuaicheantais sin fhathast ga chleachdadh gus dòighean deimhinneach a chur air adhart sam faodadh a h-uile duine a' Phàirc Nàiseanta a mhealadh.

San Iuchar 2022, chuir sinne – còmhla ri barrachd is 700 buidhnean is gnothachasan eile – ar n-ainm ri Foirgheall Ghlaschu airson Gnìomh Clìomaid ann an Turasachd, a' nochdadh ar gealltanais gun coilean sinn na dleastanasan againn, a tha sinn uile a' co-phàirteachadh, a thaobh atharrachadh na gnàth-shìde. Tha sinn glè mhothachail gur e àm duilich a th' ann airson gnìomhachas na turasachd an-dràsta, ach tha sinn a' creidsinn gu daingeann gu bheil cleachdaidhean seasmhach agus eaconomaidh shoibheachail a' dol còmhla ri chèile taobh a-staigh Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh.

Tha am plana seo a' cur an cèill mar a tha sinn ag amas air sin a choileanadh. Tha fios againn nach bi e furasta agus gum feum sinn a bhith so-lùbaidh gus freagarrachadh ri clìomaid atharrachail a thaobh eaconomaidh, poilitigs agus cultar. Ach tha fìor chothrom ann an seo airson Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh a bhith mar àite a tha a' sealltainn na slighe airson choimhearsnachdan dùthchail, gach cuid an seo ann an Alba agus air feadh na cruinne. Tha mi a' dèanamh fiughair ri bhith ag obair còmhla ribh gus a chur an gnìomh thairis air an ath chòig bliadhna.



### Janet Hunter

Leas-neach-gairm

Ùghdarras na Pàirce agus Cathraiche

Com-pàirteachas Turasachd a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh



# Introduction

**The Cairngorms National Park is the largest National Park in the UK. Alongside 18,000 human residents, a quarter of the UK's threatened species also call it home.**

People have visited this special place for generations, attracted by the landscape, wildlife and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. This in turn has supported a thriving visitor economy, the largest employment sector in the National Park.

Our continued ambition is for tourism to be a force for good, not only in economic terms but also by contributing to thriving communities and making the Cairngorms a great place to live and work. We want to inspire our visitors to have great experiences and to take action to address the climate and nature crises, harnessing their love for this place to affect positive change.



# National Park Partnership Plan and strategic context

This document is the action plan for 2023-28 and it sits within the wider context of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27, which acts as the overarching sustainable tourism strategy.

Launched in August 2022, the Partnership Plan sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues in the period from 2022 to 2027. The Plan sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park and guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park and contribute to national programmes of work set out by Scottish Ministers.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Cairngorms Business Partnership have both signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action on Tourism and the National Park Partnership Plan is our climate action plan for the destination. Further information is available at [unwto.org/the-glasgow-declaration-on-climate-action-in-tourism](https://unwto.org/the-glasgow-declaration-on-climate-action-in-tourism).

The Partnership Plan is arranged in three sections – Nature, People and Place – with each section setting out the outcome that we want to achieve by 2045 (the year Scottish Government has committed to achieving net zero). Each of these sections is supported by a set of objectives, actions for the next five years and a comprehensive set of policies.





Image of horse riding at Alvie Estate © VisitScotland / Liam Anderstrem

The actions within the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan add value to the National Park Partnership Plan and set out the contribution of the wider tourism industry to the delivery of particularly relevant objectives. In developing the plan, we have also considered how we can contribute to Scotland Outlook 2030 – the national tourism strategy – as well as Scotland’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

The delivery of this Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is coordinated by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, which brings together key businesses, agencies involved in tourism, community representatives and the private sector destination organisations that cover the National Park (including Cairngorms Business Partnership, VisitAberdeenshire and Visit Moray Speyside). It is one of a range of advisory forums for the National Park.

Alongside this Sustainable Tourism Action Plan there is a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan that sets out a strategic approach to investment in, and maintenance of, tourism and visitor infrastructure in the Cairngorms National Park. The Local Development Plan will guide the form of any built development and ensure it is in the right place. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan (still in development at the time of writing) will promote an economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms. Also in development is the Active Cairngorms Action Plan, which will include a range of actions to influence how people travel to and around the National Park.

# European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool that enables national parks and other protected areas to develop and manage tourism sustainably. It is based on five principles:



**Giving priority to protection**



**Contributing to sustainable development**



**Engaging all stakeholders**



**Planning sustainable tourism effectively**



**Pursuing continuous improvement**

The Charter is about bringing people together and providing them with a framework to work collaboratively towards becoming a sustainable destination, with external verification and recognition of our work in this area. You can find more information about the Charter at [europarc.org](http://europarc.org).

The Cairngorms National Park has been accredited with the Charter since 2005, shortly after designation as a national park. Every five years we look back on what has been delivered over the previous five-year period, assess what has changed and prepare a new Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism.

# Tourism in the Cairngorms National Park

Visitor numbers have grown steadily since the Cairngorms National Park was designated in 2003.

In 2019, the Cairngorms welcomed an estimated two million visitors for the first time. Alongside that, visitor satisfaction rates had also climbed, with an average satisfaction score of over 9 out of 10. Visitors were also more likely to be attracted by national park status, with 55% saying that it was an important factor in their decision to visit. Although most visitors were repeat customers, there was an increase in both first-time and overseas visitors.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed everything. We worked, in common with destinations around the world, to address the twin challenges of the sudden collapse of the visitor economy, followed by increased post-lockdown footfall at key countryside sites. In the Cairngorms this led to a range of challenges, including more traffic and parking congestion, toileting problems and high levels of informal camping. This prompted us to take a number of practical measures, including the establishment of a Managing for Visitors Group and a directly-managed Park Authority Ranger Service.



Image of hikers in Braemar © Liam Anderstrem / Park Authority



Image of bikers at the Boat Hotel © Mark Craig / Park Authority

As the recovery period progresses, business surveys show that a number of wider factors are still challenging the tourism industry. Staffing and recruitment issues continue to prove very challenging after the loss of hospitality staff during the Covid-19 crisis, coupled with the limited availability of affordable housing. Concerns around Covid-19 have not completely disappeared but are now overshadowed by consumer concern about the cost-of-living crisis and rising energy costs. Inflationary pressures are also causing direct issues for businesses, with a significant dip in medium to long-term confidence. For example, in mid-2022 around 8% of businesses said they were considering ceasing to trade (source: Cairngorms Business Barometer).

These factors are set against the significant backdrop of the climate and nature crisis, our collective response to which forms the backbone of the Partnership Plan. As visitors return to the National Park, we need to work together to help reduce carbon emissions from vehicles (responsible for over three quarters of visitors' carbon footprint) and encourage everyone to take care of this special place.

Current projections show that the Cairngorms National Park should reach net zero relatively early, by 2025. This is largely due to significant potential to store carbon through peatland restoration and expansion of woodland. The National Park therefore has potential thereafter to be a significant carbon sink, helping meet national net zero targets. There is an opportunity to engage and inspire visitors with this exciting and progressive work.

# Sustainable Tourism Action Plan



In delivering the actions detailed on the following pages, all of which will help to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan, there are two overarching principles:

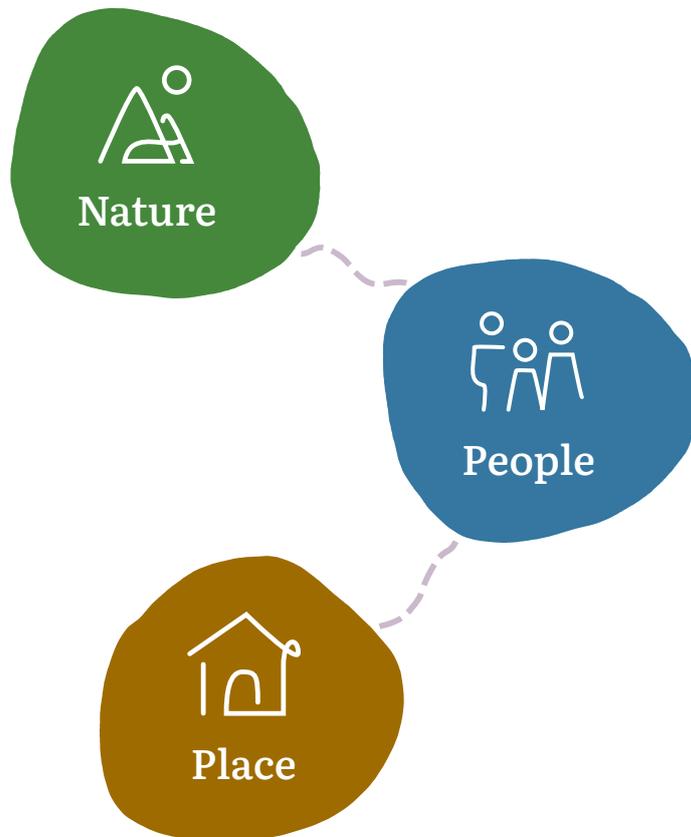


Businesses, visitors and wider stakeholders should be engaged in the journey to net zero and nature recovery.



Communities and local residents should be involved in tourism decision-making where it affects them.

The actions are arranged into three sections:





Nature



# Nature



**Outcome: A carbon negative and biodiversity rich National Park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems.**

Research shows that the majority of our visitors are attracted by the landscapes and wildlife that make this such a special place. We want to deepen that connection with the natural environment, presenting visitors with opportunities to make a positive contribution through visitor giving, volunteering and responsible behaviour choices.

**Delivering against National Park Partnership Plan objectives:**

- A1 – Net zero
- A13 – Species recovery

**Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030:**

- Destination net zero

## 1. Visitor investment



### **ACTION**

Encourage visitor investment in the National Park through visitor giving, carbon offset schemes and other incentives, connecting visitors with the place through financial and emotional buy-in.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership

## 2. Climate Action Plan



### **ACTION**

Develop and implement a business-led Climate Action Plan that engages businesses in opportunities to lower their carbon footprint.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Business Partnership

### 3. Technological solutions



#### **ACTION**

Investigate technological solutions to engage visitors and nudge them towards responsible choices in a way that enhances their experience of the destination.



#### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, VisitScotland

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### 4. Pre-arrival visitor information



#### **ACTION**

Develop a programme that supports business engagement with customers in advance of their visit, including information about biodiversity and responsible enjoyment.



#### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Business Partnership, Park Authority, Growbiz

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### 5. Reducing species disturbance



#### **ACTION**

Develop and implement mechanisms to reduce disturbance on key species and recreational impacts on high ground.



#### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority and NatureScot, ranger services, Cairngorms Business Partnership

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People





## Outcome: A wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.

Tourism forms a major sector of the local economy but there are opportunities to improve the value it adds to the lives of local residents and communities, developing and promoting hospitality as a career and supporting communities to benefit from the visitor economy.

### Delivering against National Park Partnership Plan objectives:

- B2 – Wellbeing economy
- B4 – Skills and training
- B5 – Community assets and land
- B8 – Gaelic language and culture
- B10 – A Park for all

### Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030:

- Our passionate people
- Our diverse businesses

## 1. Community-led tourism



### ACTION

Support, encourage and promote community-led tourism enterprises and develop a community tourism network for the National Park.



### PARTNERS (lead first)

Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey,  
Scotland's Community Tourism Network,  
Cairngorms Business Partnership

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## 2. Resident research



### ACTION

Monitor residents' attitudes to tourism in their community through regular surveys and informal open meetings.



### PARTNERS (lead first)

Park Authority

## 3. Cultural heritage



### **ACTION**

Strengthen cultural events through visitor engagement with Gaelic and other languages, music, storytelling and built heritage.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership

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## 4. Fair work and wellbeing



### **ACTION**

Identify measures and support needed to encourage fair work practices and a wellbeing economy in the tourism industry.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership

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## 5. Employment, training and skills



### **ACTION**

Promote the Cairngorms as an exceptional destination to work in the hospitality industry and develop a training initiative to strengthen links between local schools / further and higher education organisations and the hospitality sector.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Business Partnership, Highlands and Islands Enterprise / Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland

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# 6. Business engagement



**ACTION**

Review and refresh the 'Make it Yours' business engagement programme to ensure it meets the needs of our partners and informs and inspires frontline staff.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership

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# 7. Equalities, diversity and inclusion



**ACTION**

Encourage a more diverse range of visitors to the Cairngorms by addressing barriers identified by under-represented groups and people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and support training for frontline hospitality staff to offer a warm welcome to visitors of all backgrounds.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority

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# 8. Local visitor levy



**ACTION**

Engage with stakeholders to ensure that Scottish Government's proposals for a local visitor levy meet the needs of the Cairngorms National Park.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Local authorities, Park Authority



Place



# Place



**Outcome: A place that people want to live in, work in and visit that works for all.**

Visitors contribute not just economically but socially to life in the National Park, supporting investment in infrastructure, businesses and events to help create thriving communities. We want to spread these benefits by developing and promoting assets in communities with additional visitor capacity, and encouraging visits at traditionally quieter times of year.

**Delivering against National Park Partnership Plan objectives:**

- C1 – Access to housing
- C5 – Visitors to the National Park
- C6 – A sustainable destination
- C8 – Accessible path and cycle network
- C9 – High-quality visitor experience

**Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030:**

- Our thriving places
- Our memorable experiences

## 1. Tourism infrastructure



### **ACTION**

**Produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan that defines the priorities for investment in tourism infrastructure for the next five years and seek additional funding for delivery.**



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, VisitScotland

## 2. Visitor accommodation



### **ACTION**

Monitor the implementation of the new short-term let licensing arrangements and the development of measures such as the short-term let control areas, and ensure that we maintain an appropriate range of accommodation for visitors.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, local authorities

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## 3. Tourism assets



### **ACTION**

Promote and invest in tourism assets produced by previous place-based initiatives – including Badenoch: The Storylands, SnowRoads Scenic Route, Tomintoul and Glenlivet Dark Sky Park, Cateran Eco-museum, the Speyside Way and Deeside Way.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Business Partnership, Park Authority, VisitScotland

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## 4. Reducing seasonality



### **ACTION**

Support development of new products and events to encourage visits at quieter times of year, particularly through the winter months. Commission destination marketing campaigns to foster growth at traditionally quieter times of year and to encourage longer stays, with increased value to the local economy.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority and Cairngorms Business Partnership

## 5. Business support



### **ACTION**

Develop opportunities for businesses to use their location in a National Park to build sustainable growth through branding, product development and targeted marketing.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Cairngorms Business Partnership, Park Authority

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## 6. Partnership working



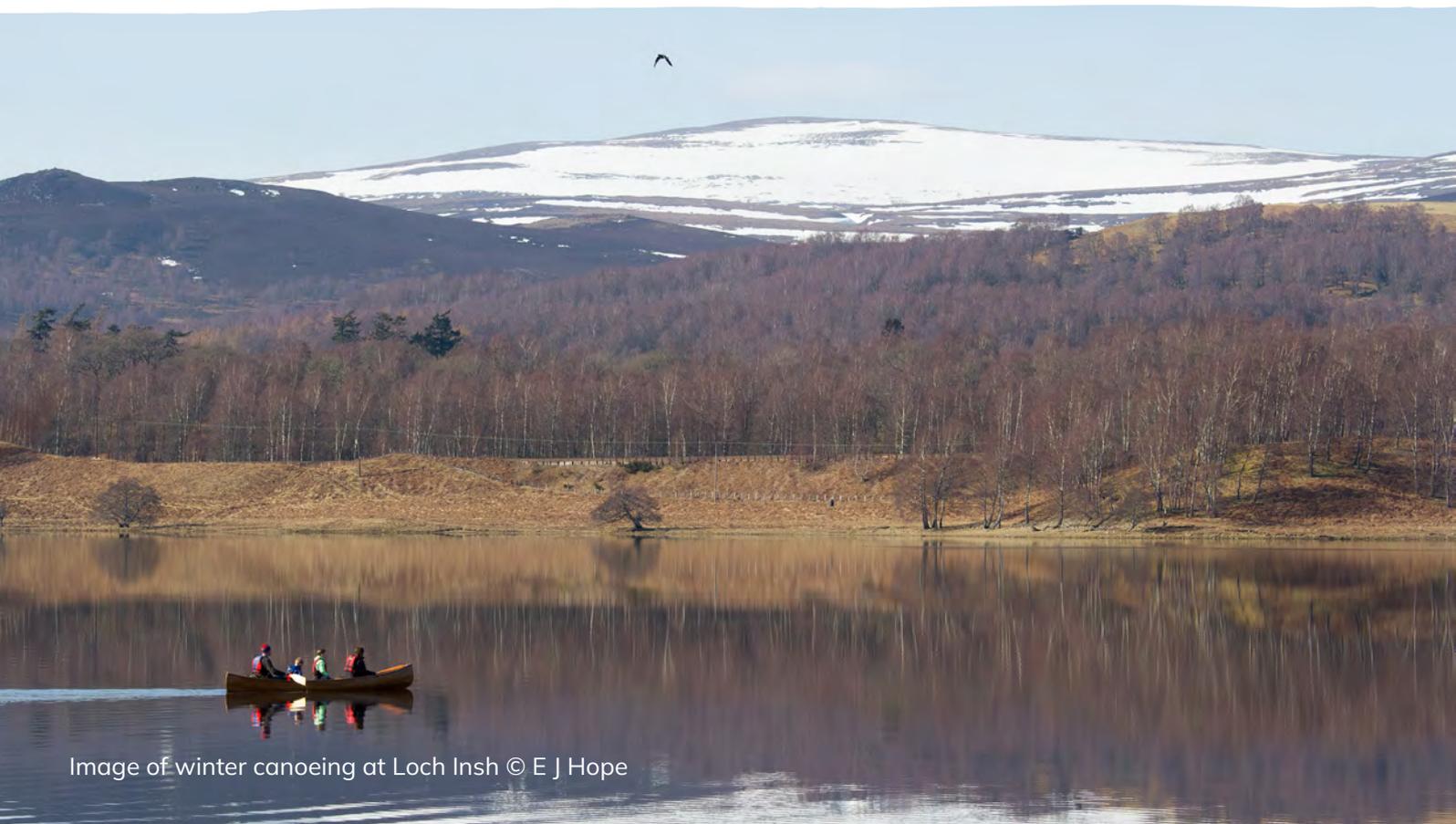
### **ACTION**

Build on the partnership structures and policies developed in response to the Covid-19 lockdowns as a model for resilience against future uncertainty.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority



# Monitoring and review

**A comprehensive programme of work is being set out to monitor delivery of the actions set out in the National Park Partnership Plan.**

The monitoring and review of this action plan will be closely tied to this work and led by Park Authority officers, with contributions from all relevant stakeholders. The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership will oversee delivery of the action plan and a formal report will be taken, at least annually, to the Cairngorms National Park Authority board.

Image of Ballater © Liam Anderstrem / Park Authority





**Cairngorms**  
National Park

Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
**Mhonaidh Ruaidh**

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