
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: NATIONAL PARK PLAN - APPROVAL FOR SUBMISSION TO MINISTERS

Prepared by: Hamish Trench, National Park Plan Officer

Purpose

To approve the National Park Plan and Consultation Report for submission to Ministers.

Recommendations

That the Board approve the National Park Plan and Consultation Report for submission to Ministers subject to the support of the Advisory Panel on Joined-up Government.

Executive Summary

This paper brings the National Park Plan and accompanying Consultation Report to the Board for approval and agreement to submit it to Ministers. The National Park Plan brings together all those involved in managing the area to set out a shared vision, a framework for management and priorities for action. It is the key tool for co-ordinating the delivery of the aims of the National Park.

The plan has been developed over two years through an open and transparent process that has involved stakeholder engagement at each stage. A formal public consultation on the draft plan was held from 31st March to 30th June 2006, which provided a significant number of constructive comments and suggestions for improvement. These have been used to complete the plan, which has developed significantly from its draft form.

Following approval by the Board, a meeting of the Advisory Panel on Joined-up Government is scheduled to seek broad support for the plan across the relevant public bodies, emphasising a collective approach. The plan will then be submitted to Ministers for approval, and implementation is due to begin at the start of the 2007-08 financial year.

NATIONAL PARK PLAN - APPROVAL FOR SUBMISSION TO MINISTERS - FOR DECISION

Introduction

1. This paper brings the National Park Plan to the Board for approval, accompanied by a final consultation report.

The National Park Plan

2. The full text of the plan is at Annex 1. The National Park Plan brings together all those involved in managing the area to set out a shared vision, a framework for management and priorities for action. It is the statutory duty of the National Park Authority to prepare the plan, which is the key tool for delivering the aims of the National Park in a collective and co-ordinated way.
3. The plan has a particular role in joining up the work of the public sector in the Park, through greater co-ordination and closer alignment of corporate and operational priorities. However, the plan also depends on the private, community and voluntary sectors which have made a crucial contribution to its development, and will continue to be vital to implementation.

Development of the Plan

4. The plan has been developed through an open process which the Board originally set out in September 2003. This began in 2004 with a review of the current policy context and key issues facing the Park, and collation of information on the current state of the Park.
5. In April 2005, an initial draft of the vision and strategic objectives for the plan was set out as a basis for discussions with partners. Throughout 2005 a series of meetings was held with a wide range of organisations to discuss the issues they would like to see the plan address. These discussions shaped the Draft National Park Plan which was published for a formal public consultation from 31st March to 30th June 2006.
6. The public consultation (see section below) provided a significant number of constructive suggestions to develop and improve the plan. Following the consultation, further discussions with partners were held where necessary to clarify issues raised and discuss the best means to address them. The comments received during the consultation and ongoing discussions have informed the completion of the plan.

Consultation

7. The National Park Plan is the product of extensive consultation throughout the process set out above. From the early stages of the plan's development the drafting has been publicly available, through board papers and informal circulation to stakeholders. Informal discussions with over 50 organisations helped to shape the Draft National Park Plan, which was then published for a formal public consultation from 31st March to 30th June 2006.
8. A full report of the consultation which summarises the responses and sets out how they have been taken into account in completing the plan is at Annex 2. This will be published with the plan. During the consultation, 124 written responses were received, and 31 consultation meetings were held with interest groups and communities. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

Breakdown of respondents	Number	%
Public Bodies	21	17%
Non-Governmental Organisations/National Governing Bodies	13	10.5%
Communities	7	5.5%
Professional Associations/Businesses	22	18%
Individuals	61	49%

Completion of the Plan

9. The plan has been completed using the comments and suggestions for improvement received during the public consultation and meetings with partners. Many changes were relatively easily incorporated through discussions with partners, and the more significant changes were discussed by the Board and approved on 3rd November 2006, including the revised vision and structure of the plan.
10. The completed plan has developed significantly from the draft, informed by these consultation responses and discussions. It sets out a long-term vision, strategic objectives which provide a framework for management, and priorities for action to focus the collective efforts of partners over the five years from 2007-2012.

Recommendation

- 11. The Board is recommended to approve the National Park Plan and Consultation Report for submission to Ministers subject to the support of the Advisory Panel on Joined-up Government.**

Policy Context

12. The completion of the National Park Plan by the end of 2006 is one of the 7 priority goals within the Corporate Plan for 2005-08. It provides a context for other policy development for the Park, including the Local Plan.
13. The plan shows how the National Park can contribute to national policy objectives, as well as providing a framework for more local strategies and policies to be better integrated.

Delivering Sustainability

14. Sustainable Development is one the guiding principles identified in the plan. The plan has been designed to work towards all four National Park aims collectively, to help deliver sustainability.

Delivering A Park for All

15. Social justice – A Park for All – is one of the guiding principles identified in the plan, which promotes a culture of inclusivity as well as specific actions throughout to improve inclusion.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

16. The National Park Plan is the key tool in promoting more joined-up government within the Park. Adding Value is one of the guiding principles identified in the plan, and the structure is designed to promote greater alignment in public sector effort and resources.

Implications

Financial Implications

17. The National Park Plan does not set out operational detail or financial commitments for any of the partners, including the National Park Authority. It sets out the direction, and the five year outcomes towards which we collectively commit ourselves to working. Implementation now requires the relevant partners to agree the operational detail and take actions to deliver the outcomes.
18. The National Park Authority, like other partners, will need to include the relevant actions for us to deliver within our operational plans. The amount of resources available will clearly be influenced by the forthcoming spending review. Implementation of the Authority's role in the first year of the plan is already being detailed through preparation of the Authority's operational plan for 2007-08.

Presentational Implications

19. This is an important milestone for the National Park. It is important that we maintain the communication which has built up with stakeholders throughout this process and keep people informed as the plan is approved by the board and submitted to Ministers. It is also an opportunity to promote an emphasis on the National Park as a whole, and the range of partners and interests involved, rather than simply the National Park Authority as an organisation. In taking forward the next steps, communications should present implementation in the context of the National Park as a whole.
20. The main opportunity to promote the content of the plan and stimulate enthusiasm for its implementation comes once the plan is approved by Ministers and published. Arrangements for document design and printing are in hand and the complete set of documents that will be available following approval is:
 - a) National Park Plan
 - b) Consultation Report
 - c) Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement
 - d) State of the Park Report (published April 2006)

Implications for Stakeholders

21. The submission of the plan for approval is a significant milestone for all stakeholders involved in the National Park. Having been shaped through extensive stakeholder engagement, implementation of the approved plan will continue to depend on the active engagement of stakeholders, in particular, those identified in the plan as partners responsible for delivering actions. Once the plan is approved by Ministers, there will be a significant effort required amongst all partners in 2007 to begin implementation, and to develop the most effective ways of working together to deliver and monitor the plan.

Next Steps – Approval and Implementation

22. A meeting of the Advisory Panel on Joined-up Government is scheduled for the 4th December, at which we will seek support from public sector bodies for the plan. Although the private, voluntary and community sectors are crucial to the plan, there is a particular role in joining up the work of public bodies, which have a statutory obligation to have regard to the plan. We therefore intend to seek their support for the plan and submit the plan to Ministers as a joined-up approach amongst the public bodies.
23. Following the Advisory Panel on Joined-up Government, the plan will be submitted to Ministers for approval. It will be accompanied by a covering letter and the following documents:
 - a) Consultation Report – recording the summary of consultation responses and how these have been used to complete the plan;
 - b) Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement – recording how environmental considerations and the consultation comments on the

Environmental Report (published with the draft plan) have been used to complete the plan.

- c) State of the Park Report – the previously published report providing background and baseline information.

24. As the plan is submitted to Ministers, a letter will be sent to all who responded to the public consultation to inform them of progress. The text of the plan and consultation report will be available on the National Park Authority's website as annexes to this board paper, and the National Park Plan webpage will be updated.

25. The exact timescale for approval by Ministers is unknown, but we anticipate that the plan will be approved before the Scottish elections. A communications plan is in place to take forward the printed materials and other communications that will be necessary following approval. This will include printed copies of the National Park Plan, accompanied by electronic copies of the Consultation Report and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement. A separate easy-read summary of the plan will also be prepared and circulated to all households and businesses in the Park. Press coverage once the plan is approved is an opportunity to focus on some of the content of the plan – the main messages about what difference the plan seeks to make. The arrangements for a formal launch event, if appropriate, will be led by the Minister.

26. The plan sets out a framework for implementation, which will be developed further early in 2007, including work on stakeholder analysis and clarifying the respective roles of the National Park Authority and other partners. Individual and collective discussions with partners will seek to establish the most effective and efficient mechanisms for implementation. We anticipate convening an event with key partners focused on implementation in late May or June. A key focus for 2007 will be to establish the necessary mechanisms for implementation, establish the monitoring programme and ensure delivery of the plan begins within the 2007-08 financial year.

Hamish Trench
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hamishtrench@ Cairngorms.co.uk