

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title:**                   **Approval of Outdoor Access Strategy**

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#### **Purpose**

This paper summarises the development of an Outdoor Access Strategy 2007 – 2012 for the Cairngorms National Park and seeks the Board's formal approval.

#### **Recommendations**

That the Board:

- a) notes the work that has gone into the development of the Strategy, including the input from the Local Outdoor Access Forum and the feedback received from consultees; and
- b) approves the Strategy.

#### **Executive Summary**

This is the first time that an Outdoor Access Strategy has ever been prepared for the Cairngorms area. The Strategy is needed to ensure that a consistent and National Park-wide approach is taken to the delivery and management of outdoor access. It will assist the National Park Authority carry out its statutory duties and provide the basis for a widespread partnership approach. In particular, the policies and priorities in the Strategy will allow staff of various organisations and land managers to deal more effectively with issues as they arise and to plan ahead. This paper summarises the work that has gone on to develop the Strategy and the key changes that have been made since the Board approved an earlier draft for consultation.

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## APPROVAL OF OUTDOOR ACCESS STRATEGY – FOR DECISION

### Background

1. The Board agreed in May 2004 that an Outdoor Access Strategy should be prepared for the National Park. The content and structure of the Strategy were discussed at two further Board meetings (on 13 January and 30 June 2006) and at the latter meeting the Board approved a targeted consultation exercise.
2. Perhaps surprisingly, given the importance of the area for outdoor recreation, this is the first time such a Strategy has been prepared for the Cairngorms. But why do we need one? In essence, the Strategy is required to ensure that we take a consistent and Park-wide approach to the delivery and management of outdoor access. In particular, preparation of the Strategy provides an opportunity to review the four different approaches to management of outdoor access that have been taken in the past by the local authorities, and to:
  - a) set out a strategic approach that suits the special circumstances of the Cairngorms National Park;
  - b) define policies and priorities on matters relating to outdoor access at a more detailed level than that provided in the National Park Plan;
  - c) analyse and explain the most appropriate mechanisms for undertaking work related to outdoor access and on which the National Park Authority has a lead role;
  - d) provide a framework for planning the allocation of resources, both by the National Park Authority and partners, over a five year period; and
  - e) provide the strategic context for the Core Paths Plan which the Park Authority has a duty to prepare by February 2008.
3. The Scottish Executive Guidance makes reference to the benefits for access authorities of having an up to date Outdoor Access Strategy in place. The Strategy has been developed in close parallel with the National Park Plan and there is complete synergy with the relevant Priority for Action. Like the Park Plan, the Strategy is for the National Park, not just for the Park Authority. Its delivery will require a strong sense of partnership.
4. The Strategy focuses on delivery of the Outcomes through:
  - a) a series of Policies, grouped under five Action Themes (Section 4);
  - b) Delivery Mechanisms that are explained in Section 5;
  - c) Priorities for each Action Area (Section 6); and
  - d) a Park-wide Action Plan (Section 7).
5. Extracts from the Strategy are shown at **Annex 1**. Full copies of the Strategy are available on the Park Authority's website and are available on request from Bob Grant.

### Development of the Strategy

6. The process used to develop the Strategy, which is comprehensively described in Section 2 has followed nationally available best practice guidance.
7. The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) discussed the draft Strategy, or elements of it, on a number of occasions. Updates on the development of the Strategy and details of some of the policies were also discussed with the ViSIT Forum. The LOAF fed in their collective view of the Strategy following the consultation exercise in October 2006 and again, after further amendments had been made, at the meeting held on 16 January 2007. The LOAF has strongly recommended that the Board approves the Strategy.

## Consultation

8. The consultation was targeted at the relevant the relevant key partners which included:
  - a) Members of the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum;
  - b) adjacent local authorities, estates and representative organisations for land mangers;
  - c) relevant non-governmental organisations (e.g. RSPB and the National Trust for Scotland);
  - d) public agencies (e.g. SNH, Historic Scotland and sportscotland);
  - e) governing, membership and representative bodies (eg Ramblers' Association, and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland); and
  - f) Representatives of disability groups.
9. A total of 22 written responses were received. In general the feedback from consultees was positive and helpful and some organisations had gone to considerable trouble to compile detailed comments. A number of responses referred to the fact that the Strategy was clear, logical and provided a good sense of how the issues should be addressed. Scottish Environment Link, writing on behalf of six environmental NGOs (some of whom also provided detailed comments said in their response:

*"We warmly welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and commend the National Park Authority for producing such a comprehensive and well thought out strategy. We support and endorse this strategy and hope that other access authorities will refer to it as a model of best practice that will inform and advise them in drawing up and reviewing their own access strategies. It covers access issues of importance to both residents and visitors to the Park in great detail. We look forward to seeing the Strategy adopted and put into practice."*

10. Many of the detailed points suggested by respondents have improved the final version of the Strategy. There were also some critical comments. For example, it was suggested that there were gaps or omissions and that the flow through the Strategy to the Action Plan could be improved. Some concerns about perceived omissions were attributable to the fact that the Strategy requires to be read alongside the

National Park Plan. All of the issues that were raised have been addressed as far as possible.

### **Changes to the Strategy**

11. A number of significant changes have been made to the Strategy following the feedback received from consultees, each of which is described briefly below. In addition, a number of smaller changes have been made throughout the document.

#### ***A new policy on managing outdoor access at sensitive sites (Policy number 6)***

12. A policy already existed on managing outdoor access at popular sites but there was not a comparable one for sensitive areas. The rationale for inclusion is clear with the need to address recreational impacts at both sensitive and cultural heritage sites. The main thrust of the policy is to mitigate negative impacts by better planning and design, displacement where possible and by raising public awareness.

#### ***A new policy on bridges (Policy number 2)***

13. The need for this new policy has largely been driven by the number and type of issues that have come before Park Authority staff in the preceding year. A new policy has been developed which provides an indication of the circumstances in which the Park Authority or other public agencies would wish to become involved in capital works, repair or maintenance. The overall aim is to maximise public benefits of bridges.

#### ***Additions to the policy on improving public transport links (Policy number 12)***

14. Small but significant changes reflect the need for better facilities for less-abled people, better linking of routes to popular setting-off points for walkers and cyclists and the need to re-visit whether existing public transport routes and times meet the needs of recreational users.

#### ***Additions to the policy on promoting healthy lifestyles (Policy number 14)***

15. The opportunity has been taken to better illustrate the link between participation in exercise and health using recent research that has been made available from the Scottish Executive.

#### ***Clarification of the role of Ranger Services in the delivery of the Strategy***

16. Following an informal discussion with the Board in January 2007 the opportunity has arisen to clarify the key role that the different types of ranger services play in the management of outdoor access. The role that the ranger services have to play in relation to providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access is judged to be top of the list of seven priorities.

### ***Changes to priorities within the Action Areas***

17. The priorities for the Action areas have been revised to take into account of the feedback received from the very recent consultation exercise on Core Paths Planning.

### **Policy Context**

18. National guidance from the Scottish Executive encourages all access authorities to have an Outdoor Access Strategy in place. Staff have already informed the Scottish Executive that the Strategy for the National Park is at an advanced stage of preparation.

### **Delivering Sustainability**

19. The Strategy provides the detail required to ensure that the Outcomes in the National Park Plan's Priority for Action on providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access can be achieved. The actions and policies have been developed taking full cognisance of the four aims of the Park and have also been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The Strategy will also help take forward, at a local level, a number of Scottish Executive's priorities including the minimising carbon emissions in order to mitigate against climate change, health promotion, social inclusion, conservation of biodiversity and sustainable tourism.

### **Delivering a Park for All**

20. At the heart of the Outdoor Access Strategy is the desire to see a wider range of people being able to enjoy the special qualities of the National Park. The policies on providing for people of all abilities and other policies on path provision, visitor information and health will all contribute to the Park becoming more easily enjoyed by wider ranger of people.

### **Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency**

21. Like the Park Plan, the Outdoor Access Strategy will be a Strategy for all the relevant public bodies to deliver and therefore the pooling of resources will ensure that best use is made of available resources.

### **Implications**

#### ***Financial Implications***

22. In approving the Strategy the Board are not being asked to make a formal financial commitment. The delivery timescale for the Strategy straddles two Corporate Planning periods. The Corporate Plan covering the period 2008 to 2011 will provide the mechanism by which financial approval relating to the Strategy will be sought. In addition, as much of the delivery will be a shared task, there is a need for further detailed discussions to be held with partners. The Delivery Teams which are to be established as part of the National Park Plan implementation process will also ensure a co-ordinated approach is taken at agency and partnership level. Cost estimates for delivering the Core Paths Plan are presented in the relevant Board paper.

23. It is anticipated that a paper will be presented to the Board in April with further detail about the proposed formation of an Outdoor Access Trust for the National Park as described in Section 5. It is anticipated that the Trust would be able to deliver many of the proposals related to infrastructure contained in Section 7 of the Strategy.

### ***Presentational Implications***

24. The development of the first ever Outdoor Access Strategy for the National Park is an important achievement, both for the National Park Authority and for partners although in itself the story is not likely to be particularly newsworthy. The main users of the Strategy will be public bodies and others who are seeking clarity on a wide range of outdoor access topics. The Strategy is not likely to be read by many members of the general public. Consequently it is proposed to print and circulate a limited number of copies of the Strategy (for example, for all those who have been engaged in the consultation process) and to ensure copies are held in local libraries and at local authority service points. The Strategy will be available on the Park Authority website and in CD-ROM format.

### ***Implications for Stakeholders***

25. The key implications for stakeholders will be related to the implementation of the Strategy, as described above. Detailed discussions have already started with some of the partners, but will gather pace as the Delivery Teams for the National Park Plan are formed.

### **Next Steps**

26. An Internal Co-ordination Team has already been established within CNPA to ensure that the work on this Strategy (and the related Priority for Action) are delivered in a coordinated way. The formation of the Delivery Teams described above will take place over the next few months. The formation of the proposed Trust, subject to Board approval in April, will be a very important stage in implementation.

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