

INTRODUCTION

Overview

1. The Cairngorms National Park is a world renowned area where outdoor recreation opportunities abound. From challenging mountaineering and kayaking to quiet walking, cycling, horse riding and paddling, the area provides people with many fabulous opportunities to enjoy this exceptional environment.
2. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (“the Act”) gives Scotland what is probably the world’s best system for encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors. By providing a right of responsible access to almost all land and water in the Park, the legislation offers people a wide range of opportunities to enjoy the special qualities of the area. The Act provides the legal basis to much of what is contained in this Strategy.
3. Prior to the creation of the National Park in 2003 and implementation of the Act in 2005, each of the four local authorities that comprise the Park (Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland and Moray) had responsibility for managing issues related to outdoor access as part of their wider functions. Now that responsibility has passed to the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and so it is appropriate for that organisation to lead on the development of this Strategy. The effective collaboration that has already been established with the four local authorities, and also with Perth and Kinross Council, will continue.
4. This is the first time that a strategy for outdoor access has been prepared for the Cairngorms area. It has been developed to ensure a consistent and Park-wide approach is taken to the delivery and future management of non-motorised outdoor access. In particular, the preparation of this Strategy provides an opportunity to review the four different approaches to management of outdoor access that have been taken 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 in the National Park Plan;
 - c) analyse and explain the most appropriate mechanisms for undertaking work related to outdoor access;
 - 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 Draft Core Paths Plan which the Park Authority has a duty to prepare by February 2008.
5. It is important to note at the outset that this Strategy does not aim to be a strategy for all forms of recreation. There are many types of recreation that take place in the Park – almost too many to list. There are also a range of governing bodies that have an important role in developing specific guidelines for each sport such as the

Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Scottish Canoe Association. And new forms of recreation are being developed constantly, while the popularity of some of the forms changes over time. But almost all types of informal recreation in the Park depend on the ability to take access to land and water, so this Strategy focuses on how that access can take place in an appropriate way.

6. The Strategy should be read alongside the National Park Plan. That document contains a more substantial policy context and a number of specific strategic objectives for Outdoor Access and Recreation in the section on Enjoying and Understanding the Park. These objectives are integrated with others on conserving/enhancing and living/working in the Park. Taken together, the National Park Plan and this Strategy provide a sound strategic basis for the managing recreation and access issues in an integrated way.
7. It should also be emphasised that this Strategy is for the area of ground designated as a National Park – it is not a strategy for the National Park Authority. It will require a very considerable effort from a wide variety of people to make the work described here happen successfully – for example, from land managers (who may be private individuals, trusts, public bodies or other organisations) and from government agencies, local authorities, and from the people who participate in outdoor recreation themselves. The job of the Park Authority is to lead the process and make sure the Strategy is delivered in a coordinated way across the whole of the National Park.
8. The provision of high quality opportunities for outdoor access has been highlighted as one of the key priorities for the National Park over the next five years. Investment in this field can deliver across a wide range of policy agendas that are important in Scotland at the present time. For example, a good path network that is well connected to public transport services will help minimise carbon emissions from residents and visitors in order to mitigate against climate change and will promote healthy lifestyles. And it is possible to achieve these benefits while simultaneously providing something for people on low incomes, promoting both social inclusion and sustainable tourism and winning public support for the conservation of biodiversity.
9. The Strategy is in seven sections with a series of supporting annexes and is structured as follows:
 - a) **Introduction** - Section 1 provides a brief introduction to the Strategy and explains why CNPA is leading this work.
 - b) **Scene setting** - Section 2 deals with the policy background relating to outdoor access and expands on the statutory duties that now fall on the CNPA. The process that has been used to develop this Strategy is also explained.
 - c) **Vision, Strategic Objectives and five year Outcomes** – Section 3 sets out the vision for Outdoor Access in the Park, defines the Strategic Objectives and the five year Outcomes.
 - d) **Action themes and Policies** – The National Park Plan identifies a number of priority areas for action over the next five years, each with a specific set of

outcomes. This section highlights the policies required to address the key issues identified and deliver these outcomes.

- e) **Action Mechanisms** - This section identifies the various groups of people who are available for the management of outdoor access in the Park and teases out the role they are expected to play.
- f) **Action Areas** – The Action Areas provide a more detailed, spatial dimension to the Strategy and identify specific issues and priorities in eight different areas of the Park.
- g) **Park-wide Action Plan** - This section defines the actions that will be needed to deliver the Strategy outcomes that are identified in Section 3, and the organisations and stakeholder groups involved in making them happen.

10. **Terminology:** There are a number of terms used throughout the Strategy that it will be useful to clarify early on.

- a) **Residents and Visitors:** The term “resident” is used to refer to people who live in the National Park. “Visitors” come from many different places, with different interests and levels of knowledge about the area. Enjoyment of the Park is not only relevant to those people travelling to the area, but is part of the everyday experience of residents too. References to visitors throughout the Strategy therefore includes all these different groups – from those enjoying their local area, to those who travel far to come here.
- b) **Recreational users:** This term is very generally used to refer to those people participating in recreation. There is sometimes also reference to “functional” access – i.e. walking or cycling as part of people’s daily lives, for example, to get to work.
- c) **Land managers:** Again the term is used rather generally to mean all those who directly manage land, usually because they own it or have a legal basis for doing so. It includes private individuals, tenants, trusts and other legal entities, local authorities, public agencies, etc.
- d) **Informal recreation:** Recreational activity which typically involves some walking, cycling, riding or paddling and is typically not organised through formal governing bodies, clubs and associations.

ACTION THEMES AND POLICIES

Introduction

11. This Section sets out the five main Action Themes where activity is needed to address the issues highlighted from both the access audit and stakeholder workshop. Specific policies have been developed under each of the Themes and are shown in shaded boxes. It should be noted that these are policies for the area of ground that has been designated as a National Park and not organisational policies for the National Park Authority.

12. The suite of Policies in this Section should be considered along with the Sections on Action Mechanisms, Action Areas, and the Park-wide Action Plan to determine how the issues will be addressed over the next 5 year period. The Policies in this Section should be used to guide decision making by all of the relevant individuals and organisations in the National Park.

Action Theme 1: Improving path provision and quality

13. OAS Policy 1: Improving path provision and quality

A consistent approach should be taken to path creation, repair and maintenance in the National Park on the basis of the following principles:

- a) The Core Paths Planning process, which will involve widespread public consultation and linkage with neighbouring access authorities, will be an important factor in deciding on priorities for planning and management of path provision around and between local communities;
- b) Investment in upland path repair and maintenance will be prioritised on the basis of periodic Park-wide surveys, drawing on both field survey and stakeholder input;
- c) Investment in both lowland path and upland path repair will be undertaken utilising high quality specification and design (using local materials where appropriate to the site) appropriate to the local circumstances and the planned level and form of use;
- d) Upland path repair and maintenance should strive to retain the wild qualities of the area by ensuring that paths have a less formal character the further the path is from roads or places of habitation;
- e) Greater effort should be made to collect quantitative, verifiable information about the effects of investment in the outdoor access resource in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits.

14. OAS Policy 2: Bridges

Bridges provide an essential part of the infrastructure for outdoor access in the National Park and their management and funding should be considered on the basis of the following principles:

- a) Bridges will generally belong to the relevant land manager or to another organisation that helped put them in place. These parties will normally be legally responsible for the structures and best placed to lead on repair and maintenance activity;
- b) Where there are significant public benefits arising from use of a bridge, there may be a case for provision of public funds for repair and maintenance but each case will be considered on its merits;
- c) The case for public funding support is likely to be stronger if the bridge forms part of a promoted path or network, meets the needs of a wide range of users and all abilities (where appropriate) and if the work is supported by a regular programme of inspection and maintenance;
- d) Public funds are very unlikely to be committed to repair or maintenance of a bridge unless there is a commitment from the owner/manager to maintain the structure for a period of not less than ten years.

15. OAS Policy 3: Provision for people of all abilities and multi-use paths

There should be a wide range of opportunities in the Park for a full range of experiences for people of all abilities on the basis of the following principles:

- a) a presumption in favour of barrier free paths, managed for a wide variety of users, wherever appropriate;
- b) there should be good opportunities for people of all abilities to experience all of the principal habitat types and landscapes of the Park including access to water, where feasible;
- c) development of a system of visitor information that accurately and consistently describes route conditions and the facilities available so that users can make appropriate choices;
- d) the reduction, removal and/or replacement of barriers that unnecessarily restrict access will be undertaken wherever possible, with priority given to those routes that are publicly promoted;
- e) where the topography permits, the Fieldfare Trust Countryside For All standards and guidelines should be followed;
- f) there is a general presumption that paths and tracks should be suitable for use by walkers, cyclists and horses wherever possible but recognising that, on occasion, ground conditions or other factors may require that certain recreational use does not take place, or takes place off-path;
- g) Provision for disabled riders should be actively encouraged. and
- h) information should be collected to develop our collective knowledge of interactions between recreational users with view to promoting people's safety and allaying their concerns.

16. OAS Policy 4: Provision for cycling, horse riding and waterborne routes and infrastructure

The development of routes and facilities that specifically cater for horse-riding, cycling and water-borne access in the Park will be undertaken where appropriate on the basis of the following principles:

- a) More specific provision for horse-riding is required in the National Park, particularly through development of promoted routes, provision of suitable parking areas and removal of obstacles;
- b) More promoted, off-road and traffic-free cycling opportunities are required (both functional routes and for recreational purposes), within, between communities and into the wider countryside. There requires to be a co-ordinated approach to network development and promotion;
- c) More secure cycle parking is required at car parks and trail heads;
- d) There is a need for more low-key infrastructure for water based recreation at popular access and egress points. Facilities should, where possible, be shared with land based users.

Action Theme 2: Promoting responsible outdoor access and management

17. OAS Policy 5: Increasing understanding of rights and responsibilities

The promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in the Park will be based on the following principles:

- a) Programmes of promotional activity will be based on targeted audiences, agreed between CNPA and SNH (and with advice from the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum) on an annual basis;
- b) Recreational users and land managers will be encouraged to take forward programmes of promotional activity relating to the Code and promote high standards and good practice amongst each peer group;
- c) Stakeholder groups that commonly find themselves in conflict situations in relation to outdoor access (e.g. anglers and canoeists) will be encouraged to come together to reach a shared perspective on the problems and develop practical solutions;
- d) Members of the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum will be encouraged to promote the Code amongst their respective peer groups and learn from the issues that have been resolved, disseminating good practice more widely;
- e) All those people who have professional contact with people who take access in the Park will be encouraged to actively promote the Code;

17. OAS Policy 5: Increasing understanding of rights and responsibilities (Cont)

- f) The National Park will be an exemplar of good practice in the provision of advice on responsible access in environmentally sensitive areas;
- g) Ranger services will have a key role in providing regular and focussed interactions between people from local communities, visitors and land managers;
- h) All parties will be encouraged to report problems or issues to the National Park Authority who will take steps to resolve them;
- i) Outdoor access issues brought to the attention of the Park Authority will be logged immediately, investigated within three months and, where possible, resolved within one year;
- j) Issues arising that are relevant to a review of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code should be logged by all parties and fed back to Scottish Natural Heritage.

18. OAS Policy 6: Managing outdoor access at sensitive sites

Management measures are required to reduce the impacts of recreation at sensitive natural and cultural heritage sites based on the following principles:

- a) Impacts on the natural and cultural heritage should be considered when any new work or upgrading of infrastructure is being planned and appropriate mitigating measures agreed, monitored and implemented;
- b) Where recreational use is currently having a negative impact, consideration should be given to promotion of alternative, more robust sites;
- c) Best practice standards in relation to path design, construction and management should be used at all sensitive sites;
- d) Extra efforts should be made to clearly explain to the public the sensitive nature of sensitive sites and how responsible behaviour can help to conserve the site's special qualities;
- e) Innovative approaches should be used to manage the impacts of recreation on natural and cultural heritage and the results should be disseminated to a nation-wide audience

19. OAS Policy 7: Organised Outdoor Access Events

The National Park provides an excellent location for organised outdoor access events, recognising that the area offers unrivalled opportunities for participants to enjoy the special qualities of the Park. The Park Authority can facilitate meetings between the interested parties and, in conjunction with partners, will develop and keep up to date specific guidelines for outdoor access event organisers, complementing the national guidance already available in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and which will aim to:

19. OAS Policy 7: Organised Outdoor Access Events (cont)

- a) guide events away from the most environmentally sensitive sites (including the higher ground in the Central Cairngorms and Lochnagar/Whitemounth massifs) and other areas which suffer from excessive pressure;
- b) minimise conflict regarding environmental and land management sensitivities by planning events on robust sites (those that are able to sustain the impacts of organised events) and at suitable times of the year;
- c) encourage the use of environmental impact studies to help assess the impacts of events on the environment in order to guide future decision making;
- d) minimise conflicts with other recreational users and their enjoyment of the Park's special qualities;
- e) promote early dialogue between event organisers, land managers and all other interested parties so that appropriate mitigation measures can be adopted; and
- f) encourage participants in events to behave responsibly and to use the events to actively promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;

20. OAS Policy 8: Managing outdoor access at popular countryside sites

Active management measures should continue to be applied and monitored at popular recreational sites in the Park so as to maximise visitor enjoyment, safeguard health and safety, maintain or enhance the quality of the environment and to minimise the adverse effects of recreational use. The Management for People system¹³ should be used at popular countryside sites within the Park where possible.

In relation to camping at un-managed sites the policy in the Park is based on:

- a) positive management measures should be adopted to discourage roadside camping (except in the circumstances prescribed in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code);
- b) promoting the provision of suitable managed facilities for camping – especially in those areas where there is demand and/or where current un-managed camping is causing problems;
- c) direct involvement of the relevant ranger service in the area to provide assistance to land managers where there are problems; and
- d) development, in association with land managers and appropriate representative bodies, of signage and other written material that explains the problems and encourages responsible behaviour.

21. OAS Policy 9: Car parking charges

The positive management of motorised traffic at popular locations for recreational use is frequently required. The use of car park charging schemes at key sites for outdoor access and recreation is appropriate, but only where the following principles are met:

- a) Net revenue generated from car parking charges should be re-invested in caring for the natural and/or cultural heritage of the area or the opportunities to enjoy it;
- b) To encourage understanding of the need for charges, information should be provided on the objectives of any charging regime, how it is operated and by who, the use to which any income generated has been put and public transport options for users;
- c) Where public funding is being sought for development or upgrading of a car park, a condition of support should be the re-investment of any revenue generated in visitor facilities and infrastructure;
- d) In order to avoid potential confusion about charging for access and to promote car sharing, charges should only apply to vehicles and not to individuals.
- e) Arrangements should be made to allow local, regular and short stay users to pay a reduced fee through purchase of an annual/season ticket or similar, if possible across the whole Park;
- f) Where possible, car park charges should be integrated with public transport provision, for example through integrated ticketing for parking and bus use; and
- g) A £2 charge per vehicle is considered an appropriate maximum charge per day (or part of day) at 2007 prices.

Action Theme 3: Promoting visitor information about outdoor access opportunities

22. OAS Policy 10: Developing appropriate visitor information about outdoor access opportunities.

There are considerable benefits of having visitor information that meets the needs and aspirations of all those who wish to actively enjoy the National Park and promotes messages about respect, care and responsibility. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles, that there should be:

- a) good quality information that makes it attractive to get out and enjoy the special qualities of the National Park and easier for a wider range of people to do so in full awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;
- b) an emphasis on the promotion of outdoor access opportunities within the National Park that can be taken without significantly damaging sensitive natural and cultural sites or features, and information as to how people can reduce their impact on the cultural and natural heritage of the National Park whilst participating in their chosen activity;
- c) a hierarchy of more general information about opportunities at Park-wide level and more specific information about parts of the Park;
- d) an approach that is based on the principles of market segmentation so that different user groups are identified and then provided with information which is appropriate to their needs;
- e) information about outdoor access opportunities within the National Park which places the information in the context of the National Park as a whole, for example by using a map of the Park, and where appropriate, using the National Park brand;
- f) an emphasis on providing easily accessible information about where to walk, cycle and ride around and between each community in the National Park for the benefit of residents and visitors; and
- g) an emphasis on short or moderate length outdoor access opportunities and information that meets the needs and aspirations of less-able people, including accurate route descriptions.

23. OAS Policy 11: Providing appropriate way-marking.

Way-marking has a crucial role to play in encouraging people to take access and in assisting them orientate their way around the National Park. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles:

- a) There should be a network of way-marked routes around and between every community, including good information to orient people and find the start of such routes;
- b) Way-marking information must include a direction pointer, destination and approximate distance at the start of the route;
- c) It should be easy to find the start of promoted paths from the heart of nearby communities;
- d) Giving approximate times to complete the route at the starting point will help to provide comfort to those who might otherwise lack the necessary confidence to embark on the route;
- e) There will be a presumption against way-marking in wild, remote or other sensitive areas, especially in mountainous terrain, where people value the sense of wildness and are expected to be self reliant;
- f) The Park Authority will work with relevant partners to produce and keep under review technical way-marking guidance, in line with national best practice, which will lead to high standards, a consistent approach and the promotion of a feeling of being within a National Park.

Action Theme 4: Promoting sustainable transport for enjoyment of the Park

24. OAS Policy 12: Improving public transport links

The greater use of public transport by visitors and residents will contribute to achievement of national health, environment and social inclusion outcomes. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles:

- a) There should continue to be an enhanced bus service (and marketing of services) that links Strathspey with Strathdon and Deeside and Braemar with Glenshee and Pitlochry.
- b) That where public transport subsidies are made, these should be directed towards the use of the least harmful fuels available, including bio-diesel and LPG.
- c) Adequate cycle carriage provision should be encouraged on all public transport to, from and around the Park.
- d) Public transport should cater for the less able and provide carriage for wheelchairs and pushchairs;
- e) Public transport should specifically cater for a wide variety of sports equipment including skis, snowboards and large rucksacks.
- f) The further development of bus routes that link communities to popular setting off points for outdoor access will be encouraged;
- g) There should be more sustainable modal choices at car parks, including better public transport information which will encourage car users to leave their cars.
- h) More integrated ticketing is required between different transport modes and between visitor attractions and transport.
- i) Opportunities to revise public transport routes and service times in line with identified need and demand will be investigated and progressed, as appropriate; and
- j) Acknowledgement should be given to the role of community transport and its place alongside public transport.

25. OAS Policy 13: Better and safer cycling opportunities

The use of bicycles for both leisure and functional trips should be greater than it is at present. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles:

- a) cyclists require more priority lanes and safer routes to school as well as routes that are professionally engineered;
- b) reductions in vehicular speed limits on functional cycling networks can increase safety; and
- c) the Cairngorms National Park Authority will use the Core Paths Planning process and work with relevant transport authorities to ensure that an appropriate network of cycling routes can be provided within, linking between and extending beyond communities.

Action Theme 5: Promoting healthy lifestyles

26. OAS Policy 14: Promoting healthy lifestyles

Encouraging less active people to take more regular physical activity in the outdoors will help ensure that the population is healthier, will promote people's understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and strengthen the local knowledge about recreation opportunities for visitors. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles:

- a) provision of local Paths to Health type schemes so that they are available to residents in every community within the Park, utilising all available groups including Ramblers Scotland;
- b) encouragement of use of active referrals from GPs to walking or other physical activity clubs; and
- c) some marketing activity that is oriented to promote the Park as a 'healthy destination'.
- d) Encouragement of the concept of "active travel" (promoting walking and cycling as part of the daily routine, such as during the journey to work or school) both for those visiting the National Park and for those who live and work within the National Park