

# **Enjoying the Cairngorms**

## **Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007 - 2012**

**Final Draft for approval**  
February 2007

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **Overview**

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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 National 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.
- 1.3 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 National 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.
- 1.4 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:
  - set out a strategic approach that suits the special circumstances of the Cairngorms National Park;
  - define policies and priorities on matters relating to outdoor access at a more detailed level than in the National Park Plan;
  - analyse and explain the most appropriate mechanisms for undertaking work related to outdoor access;
  - provide a framework for planning the allocation of resources, both by the National Park Authority and partners, over a five year period; and
  - provide the strategic context for the Draft Core Paths Plan which the Park Authority has a duty to prepare by February 2008.
- 1.5 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 National 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. 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 National 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.

- 1.6 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 National 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.
- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 The Strategy is in seven sections with a series of supporting annexes and is structured as follows:
  - **1. Introduction** - Section 1 provides a brief introduction to the Strategy and explains why CNPA is leading this work.
  - **2. 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.

- **3. Vision, Strategic Objectives and five year Outcomes** – Section 3 sets the out the vision for Outdoor Access in the Park, defines the Strategic Objectives and the five year Outcomes.
- **4. 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.
- **5. Action Mechanisms** - This section identifies the various groups of people who are available for the management of outdoor access in the National Park and teases out the role they are expected to play.
- **6. 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.
- **7. 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.

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

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

## 2 SCENE SETTING

### Strategic Context

#### The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000

- 2.1 The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out the four aims of all National Parks in Scotland. These aims are for the National Parks themselves and not for the National Park Authorities:
- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage
  - To promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
  - To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and
  - To promote sustainable social and economic development of the area's communities.
- 2.2 The purpose of the National Park Authority is to ensure that the four aims are collectively achieved in a coordinated way. If it appears to the Authority that there is a conflict between the first aim and other National Park aims, then the National Park Authority must give greater weight to the first aim. In an international context, National Parks in Scotland fit within the International Union for Conservation and Nature's Category V Protected Areas: Protected Landscapes / Seascapes managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation.
- 2.3 The implementation of this Strategy will have an important role to play in the collective achievement of the National Park aims. For example, the provision of well maintained paths in suitable places will ensure that sensitive areas can be protected while visual scarring or habitat damage is minimised. Providing good opportunities to experience the outdoors at first hand will increase opportunities to understand and enjoy the special Cairngorms environment. Further, many businesses within and adjacent to the National Park are reliant on the excellent range of recreational opportunities in the area. The delivery of this Strategy will help to retain and develop these business opportunities which, in turn, will help to sustain local communities. In summary, the sustainable management of outdoor access in the National Park will be an important way to ensure that the special qualities of the National Park are maintained in the long term so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.

#### The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

- 2.4 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 provides everyone with access rights, as long as they are used responsibly. The Act places duties on the National Park Authority as the organisation responsible for the management of outdoor



access at a local level. Various powers are also available to the National Park Authority under the Act to carry this work forwards. This Strategy will provide the basis for undertaking this work in the Cairngorms.

## **National Park Plan**

- 2.5 The CNPA is required to prepare and submit to Scottish Ministers a National Park Plan. This is a new type of Plan which cuts across organisations and sectors, bringing together all those involved in the management of the National Park. It is a Plan for the National Park as a whole, not just for the Park Authority.
- 2.6 At the time of writing the National Park Plan has been presented to Ministers for consideration. The Park Plan describes the special qualities and sets out a long term vision and strategic objectives, looking 25 years ahead. The Park Plan identifies seven priorities for action over the next five year period, one of which is, “Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access”. The Outdoor Access Strategy will be the implementation strategy for delivering action on this priority.
- 2.7 The Plan also identifies five Guiding Principles that should guide management and decision making when working towards all of the objectives of the Park Plan. The Principles are about **how** the Plan is delivered:
- Sustainable development – A National Park for today and for the future
  - Social justice – A National Park for all
  - People participating in the Park – A National Park for people
  - Managing change – A National Park open to ideas
  - Adding value – A National Park that makes a difference

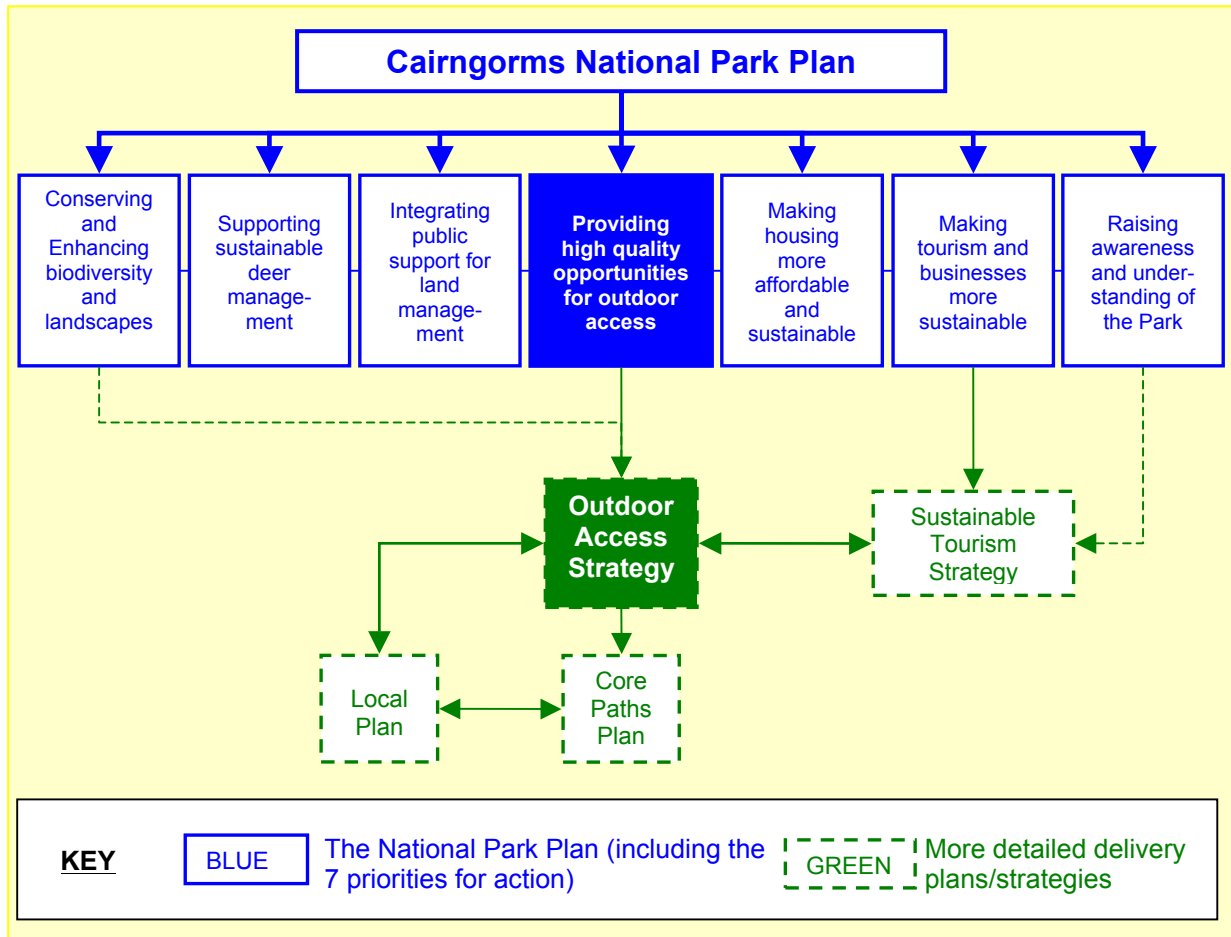
## **Development Planning and the Local Plan**

- 2.8 The Park Authority is required to prepare a single Local Plan to guide development in the National Park. At the time of writing this Plan is also in preparation. The Park Authority is the Planning Authority for those planning applications which are “called in” from the four Local Authorities on the basis that they are of general significance to the aims of the National Park.
- 2.9 The Local Plan and the process for consideration of planning applications for new development are important to the management of outdoor access. New developments can, for example, stimulate new demands for outdoor access or act as barrier to those seeking to access adjacent areas. Also, the formal planning process will be important in determining whether some proposed developments can proceed (for example new bridges or substantial new works on paths). Once formally approved, this Strategy will be a material consideration in the determination of some planning applications.

## Cairngorms National Park Strategies

2.10 This Strategy sits within the context of a number of other strategies, prepared for the National Park. The most significant of these and their relationships to the draft National Park Plan are outlined in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1 – The strategic fit of the Outdoor Access Strategy to the National Park Plan and more detailed plans/strategies**



## Other Strategies

2.11 There are a wide range of other strategies, policies and frameworks which will guide this Strategy and upon which this Strategy will have an influence. These are summarised in the Outdoor Access Audit, copies of which are available on request from the Park Authority.

## Statutory Duties of the National Park Authority

- 2.12 CNPA has a number of statutory duties to perform relating to the Act and the associated Scottish Outdoor Access Code, each of which is described below. Outwith National Parks, these duties fall on local authorities.

## Publicising the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

- 2.13 The Scottish Outdoor Access Code is the document, approved by Parliament, which sets out how to behave responsibly in the outdoors. The Code is based on three key principles which apply equally to everyone:
- Respect the interests of other people.
  - Care for the environment.
  - Take responsibility for your own actions.
- 2.14 CNPA has a duty (along with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)) to publicise the Code so that everyone is aware of their rights and responsibilities. SNH has an additional duty to promote understanding of the Code.

## Upholding Access Rights

- 2.15 CNPA has a duty to uphold access rights in the Park, specifically to, *“...assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment any route, waterway or other means by which access rights may be exercised.”*<sup>1</sup> This duty applies to all land and water to which access rights apply and CNPA can use a number of powers that are available to it.

## Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum

- 2.16 CNPA has a duty to establish at least one local access forum consisting of a reasonable balance of people and bodies representing, *“...the interests of such persons, with an interest in public access on and over land including the exercise of access rights, rights of way, core paths plans and the use of core paths, and owners, or bodies representative of owners, of land in respect of which access rights are exercisable.”*<sup>2</sup> The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum was established in March 2005 and further details about its specific role are given in Section 5.

## Core Paths Planning

- 2.17 CNPA has a duty to prepare a Core Paths Plan by February 2008 and to keep it under review. The plan will show a system of paths which are, *“...sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area”*<sup>3</sup>. Core paths can be paths or routes, including waterways, and should provide a network for all forms of recreational access including walking, cycling, horse riding and canoeing. There is a duty on the CNPA to publicise the Core Paths Plan and maps and to make them available for public inspection. At the time

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<sup>1</sup> Section 13 (1), Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

<sup>2</sup> Part 1, Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, Guidance for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities

<sup>3</sup> Section 17, Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

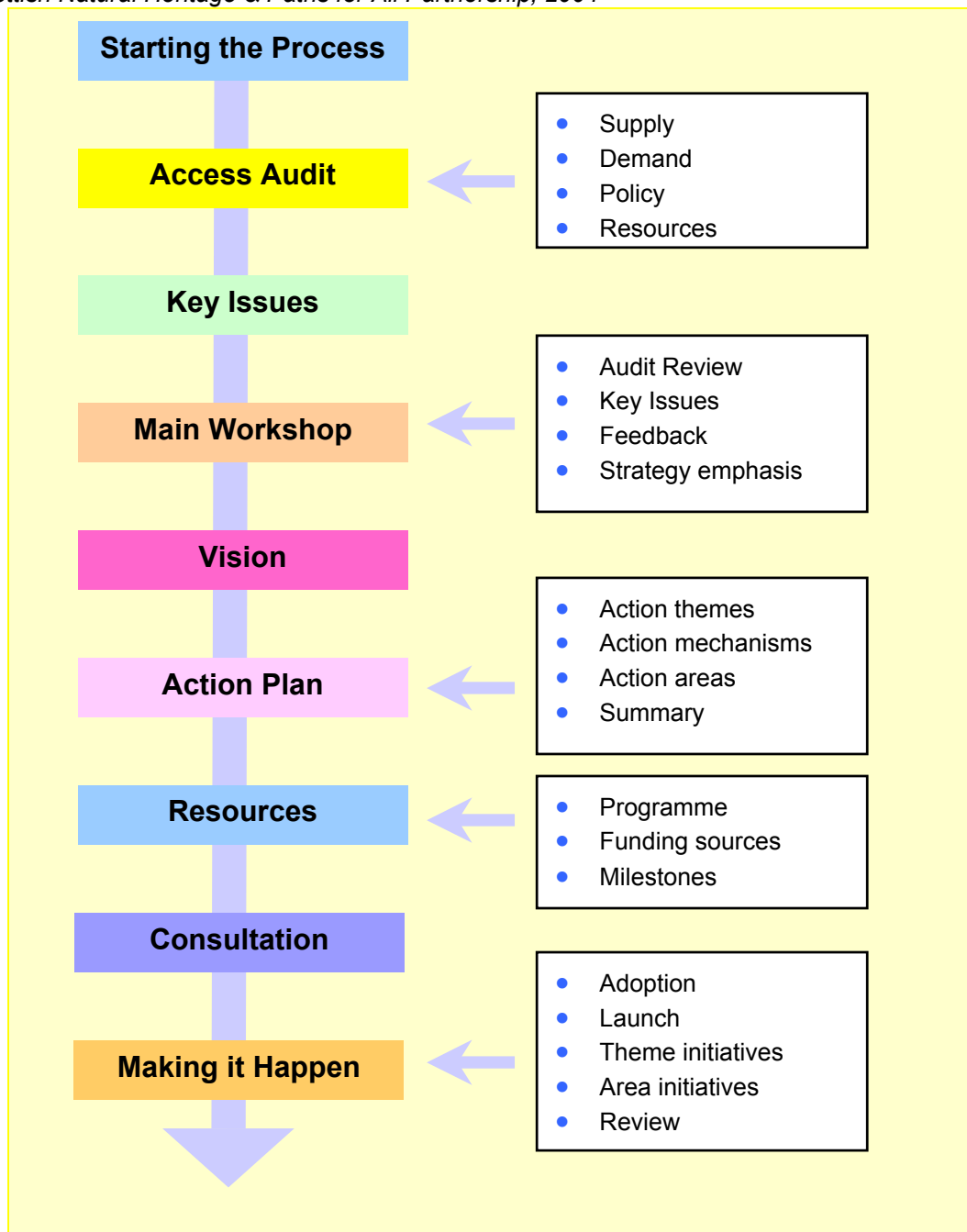
of writing the consultation exercise on the proposed network of core paths is about to start.

## Methodology

2.18 The Paths for All Partnership and Scottish Natural Heritage published a guide to good practice for developing Outdoor Access Strategies. This Strategy has been developed in line with this guidance, using the process outlined in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2 – The Outdoor Access Strategy Process**

*Scottish Natural Heritage & Paths for All Partnership, 2004*



## **Starting the Process**

- 2.19 Following an initial stakeholder meeting, CNPA established a Steering Group to guide the process. The Steering Group consists of three members of the Local Outdoor Access Forum and one member from the Paths for All Partnership, a Local Authority and the Board of the National Park Authority.

## **Outdoor Access Audit**

- 2.20 An Outdoor Access Audit was carried out to gather all the relevant information relating to Outdoor Access in the Cairngorms. The Audit comprised four sections: the Supply and Demand for outdoor access, the Policy context and the Resources committed and available. Gathering information together for the areas covered by the National Park was challenging due to the historical split of the area into parts of four local authority areas. However, the exercise was extremely useful and fed into the preparation of the State of the Park Report, which was published in April 2006 alongside the draft National Park Plan. Much of the information gathered is also now stored in digital form on CNPA's Geographic Information System. The auditing process provided much of the factual data contained in Sections 4 to 6 of this Strategy. The Outdoor Access Audit can be made available on request to CNPA.
- 2.21 The Supply Audit compiled information on provision of access opportunities in the Cairngorms (e.g. path networks, open upland areas, rivers etc.) for a wide range of outdoor activities including walking, hill-walking, climbing, cycling, snow-sports, horse-riding, water-sports, orienteering, etc. The Demand Audit examined the existing, changing and potential demand for a wide range of outdoor activities in the National Park using survey information and existing research.
- 2.22 The Policy Audit identified and assessed the implications of national legislation, local policies, agencies and partners to allow the identification of key access policy issues. The Resource Audit then went on to examine and distinguish between current and potential resources. The Steering Group were given the opportunity to make comments on and propose alterations to the Audit.

## **Key Issues and Main Stakeholder Workshop**

- 2.23 On completion of the audit process the Steering Group carried out an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for outdoor access to identify the key issues for outdoor access in the National Park. The issues identified were discussed at a workshop which was held in October 2005 and was attended by approximately 70 people representing a wide range of stakeholders.

- 2.24 The purpose of the workshop was to give participants the opportunity to discuss the key issues identified in the report and add any new ones that they felt had been missed. The full list of issues identified at the workshop is shown in **Annex 1**. Participants were then given the opportunity to propose actions for dealing with these issues and who should be responsible for taking ownership of those actions. Feedback from participants at the workshop was extremely positive. The report from the workshop was distributed to all participants and is available on request to CNPA.

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

- 2.25 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out in conjunction with this Strategy to examine the potential environmental impacts of the proposed policies within it. An Environmental Report providing an analysis of the environmental impact of the Policies, Action Area Priorities and Park-wide Action Plan was the subject of public consultation alongside the Strategy itself. The analysis in the report and consultation process meant that changes were required to be made to some of the Outdoor Access Strategy policies and action area priorities. No changes were required to the Park-wide Action Plan.
- 2.26 The changes carried out ensure that implementation of the Outdoor Access Strategy will not have any negative environmental effects and that any potential positive impacts are fully realised. There were a number of changes to the Strategy as a result of the SEA process and these are detailed in the Environmental Report. The most significant of these changes was the inclusion in the Strategy of a specific policy (Policy 6) to manage outdoor access at sensitive sites.

### **Consultation**

- 2.27 There has been good level of involvement from a number of parties in preparation of the Strategy including input from the Local Outdoor Access Forum, the Visitor Services, Information and Tourism (ViSIT) Forum and the various stakeholders who were invited to the workshop in October 2005. In addition there was a limited public consultation with key stakeholders. The public consultation on the Core Paths Plan has also contributed to the development of the Strategy.

### 3 VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

#### Introduction

3.1 This Section sets out the vision for Outdoor Access in the National Park, defines the Strategic Objectives and the five year Outcomes.

#### Vision

3.2 The first part of the National Park Plan sets out the long-term vision for the Park over a 25 year period and is structured under three broad themes with Strategic Objectives for each. The third of these is the most significant for Outdoor Access:

- Conserving, Enhancing and Managing the Park
- Communities Living and Working in the Park
- Understanding and Enjoying the Park

3.3 The text in Figure 3.1 below is an extract from the National Park Plan 25 year Vision and the section specifically relating to Enjoying and Understanding the Park.

**Figure 3.1 – Cairngorms National Park Plan ‘Vision’ (extract)**

<p><b>Vision</b></p> <p>Imagine a world-class National Park – an outstanding environment in which the natural and cultural resources are cared for by the people that live there and visit; a renowned international destination with fantastic opportunities for all to enjoy its special places; an exemplar of sustainable development showing how people and place can thrive together. A National Park that makes a significant contribution to our local, regional and national identity.</p> <p>This is our vision for the Cairngorms National Park in 2030.</p>	
<p><b>Enjoying and Understanding the Park – 25 year outcomes</b></p>	
<p><b>2006</b></p>	<p><b>2030</b></p>
<p>The Cairngorms National Park is a new entity and people are <b>uncertain</b> of what it means to be a National Park, and what they can expect of it.</p>	<p>The Cairngorms National Park will be <b>renowned</b> in Scotland and internationally, and will make a significant positive contribution to Scotland’s national identity.</p>



<b>Enjoying and Understanding the Park – 25 year outcomes</b>	
<b>2006</b>	<b>2030</b>
The area is already a popular <b>tourism destination</b> , although infrastructure, marketing and service provision is not yet co-ordinated to best effect.	The Cairngorms National Park will be an internationally recognised <b>world class sustainable tourism destination</b> that consistently exceeds residents' and visitors' expectations in terms of quality of environment, services and experience.
There is a good network of off-road paths and tracks to enjoy <b>outdoor access</b> in most areas of the Park.	There will be an excellent and integrated network of routes to enjoy <b>outdoor access</b> across the Park that meets the needs of residents and visitors.
There is an unusually wide and highly valued range of <b>outdoor recreation</b> activities available, both formal and informal.	There will be an even higher quality and increased range of <b>outdoor recreation</b> activities available and accessible to a wider range of people of all abilities to enjoy the Park.
The concept of <b>responsible behaviour</b> in terms of outdoor access is beginning to become established among those taking recreational access and managing land.	There will be a high level of understanding and widespread practice of <b>responsible behaviour</b> in the Cairngorms. Outdoor access will be enjoyed and managed as an integral part of a broader recreational experience and in ways that promote enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park while conserving them.
There is a range of <b>interpretation</b> places using various media across the Park focused on specific aspects, but the sense of collective interpretation to reveal and raise understanding of the National Park and its special qualities is yet to be realised.	<b>Interpretation</b> of the National Park will be of an internationally high standard revealing the significance and meaning of the National Park and its special qualities, helping people to understand and enjoy the area.
Many organisations use the Park as a resource for informal and formal <b>learning</b> , but the potential for contributing to national learning is yet to be realised.	The Park will be a significant <b>national learning resource</b> that raises understanding of the special qualities and sustainable development, but also contributes to national objectives.

Enjoying and Understanding the Park – 25 year outcomes	
2006	2030
There is a wealth of <b>knowledge</b> about many of the special qualities and resources of the Park from existing research and previous work. However, there are significant gaps in knowledge in some natural heritage resources and many cultural heritage and socio-economic resources.	Key gaps in <b>knowledge</b> will have been addressed, and the National Park will lead the way in research on issues such as sustainable development and rural tourism. Information will be widely accessible and contribute fully to the knowledge economy of the region and Scotland.

## Understanding and Enjoying the Park<sup>4</sup>

- 3.4 The Cairngorms National Park is known for its outstanding environment and outdoor recreation opportunities – the vision for the Park seeks to go further and develop a world-class destination which plays a significant part in the regional and national tourism economy. This requires a sustainable approach to developing tourism, an excellent quality provision of outdoor access and recreation opportunities, and a significantly enhanced awareness and understanding of the National Park, its special qualities and management needs.
- 3.5 Visitors come from many different places, with different interests and levels of knowledge about the area. Enjoyment of the area is not only relevant to those people travelling to the Park, but is part of the everyday experience of those living in and around the area. References to visitors throughout the Park Plan therefore include all these different groups – from those enjoying their local area, to those who travel far to come here.
- 3.6 The experiences of residents and visitors enjoying the National Park should be of the highest quality. Part of the integration required in managing the Park is to promote the enjoyment of the area in ways that are not only consistent with the special qualities, but actively develop understanding about the Park and contribute to its conservation and enhancement.
- 3.7 The promotion and management of outdoor access, recreation and visitor services is an integral part of developing a sustainable approach to tourism, in line with the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. It is also integral to land and water management, sustaining vibrant communities and conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage.
- 3.8 The need to understand more about what makes the National Park so special and how it functions is relevant not only to visitors, but to residents, businesses, specialist interest groups and people elsewhere in Scotland and beyond. The National Park is a national asset, and effective future

<sup>4</sup> Paragraphs 3.4 to 3.12 - extracts from the Cairngorms National Park Plan, Understanding and Enjoying the Park (Section 5.3.1 & 5.3.3).

management relies on informed debate and understanding of the Park, and its national and international importance.

## **Outdoor Access and Recreation**

- 3.9 The National Park is internationally renowned for the exceptional range and quality of outdoor access and recreation opportunities. From challenging mountaineering and kayaking to quiet walking, cycling, horse riding and paddling, from organised sports to informal exploration, the area provides many people with the chance to enjoy this exceptional natural environment in many different ways.
- 3.10 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives Scotland what is probably the best system for outdoor access in the world. The legislation offers people fantastic opportunities to enjoy the special qualities of the National Park in a responsible way. The provision of outdoor access opportunities that are well managed can also contribute significantly to important public policy agendas including social inclusion, improving health and transport and improving overall quality of life.
- 3.11 As the Park has both significant recreational appeal as well as special habitats and species that may be vulnerable to damage or disturbance, a key challenge is to establish exemplary recreation management, building on the existing expertise already in the area. Much of the tourism industry is based on people having good opportunities to get out and about and enjoy the area and the wide range of sports and recreation enjoyed by many depends on responsible access to land and water.
- 3.12 It is therefore vital to many aspects of the National Park's environment, communities and economy that there is a range of high quality opportunities for people to enjoy the area in ways that conserve the special qualities and maximise the benefits to all sectors.

## **Strategic Objectives for Outdoor Access and Recreation**

- 3.13 The Park Plan identifies seven Strategic Objectives specifically relating to Outdoor Access and Recreation:
- a) Encourage people of all ages and abilities to enjoy and experience the outdoor environment;
  - b) Promote high standards of responsible enjoyment of the park so that its special qualities are understood and appreciated, safeguarded now and for future generations to enjoy and the interests of others respected;
  - c) Develop a co-ordinated approach to the sustainable management of high quality outdoor access and recreation by the public, private, community and voluntary sectors;

- d) Plan for future outdoor recreation needs and opportunities in a co-ordinated way across sectors;
- e) Support and encourage local community involvement in the planning and management of outdoor access throughout the Park;
- f) Develop a high standard of responsible management of outdoor access based on a common understanding of the needs of access managers and users;
- g) Protect the more fragile areas of the Park from pressures arising from outdoor access and recreation.

3.14 The Park Plan emphasises the need for an integrated approach across all sectors and therefore conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the Park can be found running through all the objectives and policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy. There are other Strategic Objectives in parts of the National Park Plan that may be directly relevant to the management of outdoor access, depending on the context. These are not repeated in the Outdoor Access Strategy. Please refer to the full Park Plan for details.

## Five year Outcomes

3.15 The Cairngorms National Park Plan identifies seven Priorities for Action over the period 2007 to 2012, one of which relates to outdoor access. The five year Outcomes are shown in Figure 3.2 below and define the change that is to be achieved over this period.

**Figure 3.2 – Cairngorms National Park Plan Five Year Outcomes for Outdoor Access (extract)**

<b>Outdoor Access Outcomes for 2012 – what does this seek to achieve in five years</b>	
<b>1</b>	A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.
<b>2</b>	Land managers and those enjoying the outdoors will have a better understanding of their respective rights and responsibilities which will positively influence behaviour and enable all to enjoy the special qualities of the National Park.
<b>3</b>	There will be a more extensive, high quality, well maintained and clearly promoted path network so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors and move around the Park in a way that minimises reliance on motor vehicles.
<b>4</b>	There will be greater involvement of communities, land managers and visitors in the management and maintenance of the paths.
<b>5</b>	There will be more effective connections between public transport and places with outdoor access opportunities.
<b>6</b>	There will be locally based healthy walking groups throughout the National Park and active promotion of outdoor activity by health professionals in order to contribute positively to the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors.

## 4 ACTION THEMES AND POLICIES

### Introduction

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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

- 4.3 Access rights apply to almost all the land and water in the National Park. It is important to highlight that the rights apply to open, wooded and cultivated land, even where there are no paths. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code makes it very clear that in many circumstances it is not necessary for users to stay on a path. Many people enjoy the Cairngorms by wandering, without wishing to feel constrained to follow paths. Nevertheless, the provision of well managed paths and other related access infrastructure will assist the vast majority of recreational users for much of their outdoor visit. Paths will also greatly help land managers to guide recreational users to safe areas where they will be less likely to interfere with management activities or cause damage and disturbance. For these reasons considerable attention is devoted in this Strategy to the management of paths.

### Core paths, lowland and upland path repair, path maintenance and development

- 4.4 With responsibility for outdoor access previously being the responsibility of four local authorities, the priorities and approach taken in each part of the Park were distinctly different. When looked at afresh, and in the context of the National Park as a whole, there are inconsistencies in provision of infrastructure across different parts of the National Park.
- 4.5 There is no need to create a completely homogenous access network across the National Park but people in each local community and community of interest (including visitors) should all have access to as wide a range of access opportunities as possible. Such opportunities should not be solely

restricted to paths but should also include watercourses and wider areas where access is taken.

- 4.6 This work will be partly, but not exclusively, taken forward as part of the Core Paths Planning<sup>5</sup> exercise that will take place over the period 2006 to 2008. Many of the local networks that currently exist are of importance to those who visit the area and therefore it will be important to ensure that a clear understanding of their needs and aspirations underpins decision-making process about infrastructure and investment. Also, most local path networks are of value beyond their use for recreation – their functional use as part of people’s daily lives is covered under Action Theme 4. Long distance routes will also continue to play an important role in the broad suite of access opportunities that are available within the National Park. For example, considerable investment has been made over the last 20 years towards the management, maintenance and extension of the Speyside Way. On the eastern side of the National Park, development of the Deeside Way, although not a formally designated route, is continuing with the ultimate goal being a route from Aberdeen to Ballater.
- 4.7 Upland path repair and maintenance is largely driven by the need to protect fragile plant communities, to avoid the visual impact of unsightly erosion scars and contribute to a high quality recreational experience for walkers. Highly effective and innovative work has been carried out in some parts of the eastern Cairngorms, under the auspices of the Upper Deeside Access Trust and Angus Council. Similar high standard work has been carried out on Mar Lodge Estate with much cutting edge work done on high ground and on the reinstatement of bulldozed tracks. Highlands and Islands Enterprise’s Cairngorm Estate has also provided a consistently high level of investment over the last 20 years. Sourcing funding for the on-going maintenance to protect the capital investment in upland paths has been a long standing difficulty. Innovative approaches will be required to resolve this – for example, pre-emptive work is proving highly cost effective on the National Trust for Scotland property at Mar Lodge.

***Case study: Mar Lodge Estate***

When the National Trust for Scotland purchased Mar Lodge Estate they inherited some 130kms of paths. At that time there was no organised regime for maintenance, nor was there robust or consistent information on the condition of the network. A comprehensive audit of path condition was undertaken which resulted in a prioritised and costed plan for capital repair and maintenance.

- 4.8 Paths on high ground outside these areas, however, have not fared so well and there is a need to develop a consistent approach to ensure that the whole path resource is managed effectively and sensitively. Such an approach will

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<sup>5</sup> Core Paths Planning is a statutory requirement arising from the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and is explained in Section 2.

recognise the need to protect and enhance the landscape and natural heritage of the uplands but also recognise the wild qualities that make the Cairngorms such a special place.

- 4.9 There is currently a lack of qualitative or quantitative, verifiable information about the effects of provision of (or improvement in) outdoor access opportunities (including ensuring that paths are in good condition), on visitor satisfaction and/or socio-economic returns to businesses and communities. General information exists about the popularity of each recreational activity through the Park-wide Visitor Survey<sup>6</sup> and from other national sources. There is also considerable anecdotal information about what people like and don't like. However, the return on investment in the access resource in terms of economic, social or environmental benefits in the National Park is difficult to estimate –because of lack of previous studies, methodological difficulties and the costs of collecting the information. There would be benefits in promoting greater investigation of such issues to justify future investment.

#### **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:

- 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;
- 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;
- Investment in both lowland path and upland path repair will be undertaken follow best practice 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;
- 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;
- 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.

<sup>6</sup> Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey, 2004, Lowland Market Research.

## **Bridges**

- 4.10 There are a considerable number of bridges in the National Park that allow people to take access across rivers or streams. Each bridge has its own history and some will be of cultural heritage significance. Many bridges have been installed to assist with land management or to allow safe public access. A number of the bridges, particularly in the mountain area, have been installed with the support of local clubs and the effort of volunteers. In certain areas a bridge allows access to significant areas of land that otherwise would be unavailable or difficult. Bridges in and around communities can be vital in allowing access to connect to wider path networks.
- 4.11 Occasionally, proposals are made to install new bridges to facilitate access or to make river crossing safer. Such new facilities are, however, not always popular with all stakeholders and concerns have been expressed in the past about landscape issues and about the impacts of bridges on the sense of wildness of the mountain area. New bridges will generally be considered to be built development and so will require planning permission. The Local Plan provides further policy guidance on how such proposals will be considered in the National Park. The Paths for All Partnership have also produced a useful guidance manual on bridges including planning, design, construction and maintenance.
- 4.12 A number of issues arise from time to time to do with the repair and maintenance of bridges, for example:
- Bridges can and do fall into disrepair and, if the bridge becomes unsafe, there can be issues concerning liability for the relevant land manager;
  - At times it can be hard to ascertain ownership of a bridge, especially if the bridge was built for reasons that were not well connected to the management of the land;
  - Bridges sometimes straddle two land management units and responsibility for maintenance can be unclear or contentious;
  - Shared use of bridges by multiple users can lead to debate about who is responsible for maintenance;
  - Lack of routine inspection and maintenance can contribute to bridges suddenly being deemed unsafe, resulting in closure – this can cause considerable inconvenience for users and it can be extremely costly and time-consuming to remedy the situation.



## **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:

- 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;
- 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;
- Any new or replacement bridge should utilise current best practice guidance and be appropriate for both the location and use.
- 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;
- 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.

## **Provision for people of all abilities and multi-use paths**

- 4.13 Provision for outdoor access that is geared to people of all abilities is not particularly prevalent within the Park. For fully able individuals there is scope to enjoy, mountains, glens, forests, rivers and paths in and near communities. The same cannot be said for less able people who have relatively limited opportunities to enjoy each of the above habitats. Even where fully accessible provision exists, it is not always well promoted.
- 4.14 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a legal requirement on service providers to ensure that where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access services, they have a duty to:
- remove or alter the physical feature to make it accessible; or
  - provide reasonable means of avoiding it.
- 4.15 Accurate descriptions of what users will encounter on a route are invaluable to those who seek to actively enjoy an area that is new to them. Such descriptions are also useful for land managers and can usefully form part of the management of risk on their ground. Particular attention needs to be given to explaining the barriers that will be encountered and subjective statements about who the route is suitable for should be avoided – that decision should generally be a decision for the user.

- 4.16 Fully accessible standards have been agreed at a UK level through the Countryside For All Group. Whilst there is no legal imperative to implement these standards, they do provide clear guidance on all aspects of developing an inclusive infrastructure. Information on path surface, gradients and cross slopes can assist any person considering the development of a new route or improving an existing one.
- 4.17 Many of the obstacles that recreational users encounter are man-made and have usually been installed for legitimate land management purposes, for example fences, stiles and gates. For some users such infrastructure can be a hindrance or a complete barrier to progress. With careful design it is frequently possible to reduce the number of people who are affected by such barriers. For example, if a stile over a deer fence can be replaced with an appropriately designed self-closing gate a great many more people would be able to gain access to the other side of the fence and the purpose of the fence would not be compromised from the land manager's perspective. Land managers now have new duties under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act<sup>7</sup> and should take these issues into account as part of their day to day activities and as facilities need to be replaced. However, some financial assistance may be required to encourage good practice.
- 4.18 The new access legislation provides a general right of access for all forms of non-motorised transport including walking, cycling and horse riding. Very few paths have been designed to accommodate all three recreational user groups but it is often possible for users to share the same paths if they behave responsibly. There is a common perception that multi-use paths will increase the likelihood of conflict between different types of recreational users and may increase the risk of accidents. However, the reality is somewhat different with research<sup>8</sup> demonstrating that there commonly is a significant difference between people's perception and what occurs on the ground. New infrastructure should therefore be developed with the presumption that it will be barrier free and be for multi-use. Improvements to existing infrastructure should also work towards this goal.
- 4.19 There are a wide range of vehicle tracks that are also used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Generally, they provide a more robust surface than that of paths and more able to accommodate the range of uses listed above. On occasion, however, poorly drained tracks can be further damaged by recreational use, particularly from horses and cyclists.

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<sup>7</sup> 'To be referred to as The Act'

<sup>8</sup> How people interact on off-road routes, 2003, Countryside Agency.

### **OAS Policy 3: Provision for people of all abilities and multi-use paths**

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

- a presumption in favour of barrier free paths, managed for a wide variety of users, wherever appropriate;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- where the topography permits, the Fieldfare Trust Countryside For All standards and guidelines should be followed;
- 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;
- provision for disabled riders should be actively encouraged; and
- 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.

### **Provision for cycling, horse riding and water-borne craft**

- 4.20 The Act<sup>9</sup> will help to stimulate many more opportunities for certain types of access that have previously been constrained. This is particularly true for horse-riders, off road cyclists and water users.
- 4.21 The development of promoted path networks for horse riding or cycling has not generally been as prominent as that for walkers. As such horse riding and cycling routes are rarely well-linked and there is a general lack of well promoted, off-road opportunities for both user groups. Obstacles that can be readily overcome by walkers, and with lesser ease by cyclists, can be complete barriers to horse riders – for example stiles, kissing gates, cattle grids and some pedestrian gates. The Core Paths Planning process will go some way to highlight this lack of provision in particular areas but the development of appropriate networks may well go beyond the remit of core paths. In addition, it is recognised that horse riders require parking spaces that allow the easy loading and unloading of horses.

<sup>9</sup> Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

- 4.22 Water based recreation is an important aspect of the suite of recreational opportunities within the National Park. Difficulties have been encountered in the past finding suitable spots for access and egress from some rivers and lochs. By providing such sites it can become easier to positively manage access, allows for appropriate information to be displayed and targeted at users and allows facilities to be shared with land-based users, thus reducing costs.

#### **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 National Park will be undertaken where appropriate on the basis of the following principles:

- 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;
- 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;
- More secure cycle parking is required at car parks and trail heads;
- 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**

### **Increasing understanding of rights and responsibilities**

- 4.23 The first part in the process of increasing understanding is to raise awareness amongst the general public, especially recreational users and land managers, of the new rights and responsibilities that have arisen from the Act<sup>10</sup>. Specific attention requires to be drawn to the fact that the law is different in Scotland to the rest of the UK. Increasing people's understanding of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (and the principles that lie behind it) will also contribute to the responsible enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park.
- 4.24 Experience in the field and research findings show that people generally respond positively to requests to modify their actions or behaviour when they

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<sup>10</sup> Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

understand why they are being asked to do so<sup>11</sup>. Many of the difficulties that have come to light since the legislation has been enacted stem from a lack of knowledge from either the user or land manager's perspective. Increasing knowledge will aid the process of understanding and encourage a more collaborative approach to resolving access problems.

- 4.25 How the respective interest groups communicate and collaborate both within and outwith their own groups will partly determine the success of the legislation. CNPA and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) both have statutory duties towards the successful encouragement of responsible behaviour, but it will depend largely on those on the ground being prepared to work collaboratively to resolve issues. Effective communication has been identified by all stakeholders as the key to success. Such communication can take a wide range of formats including leaflets, websites, information boards, Ranger services and familiarisation visits to estates. The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum also has an important role to play in the encouragement of responsible behaviour both when advising the Park Authority on access issues and when communicating to the members' own constituents. Taking the message about responsible behaviour to schools has already been useful and has been successfully coupled with core paths planning meetings.
- 4.26 The vast majority of people who enjoy informal recreation in the National Park do not belong to any organised club or society. For those who visit the Cairngorm Mountains the proportion who are not members of walking, climbing, skiing or other associate clubs is 75%<sup>12</sup>. Clearly this presents a challenge and there is a need to develop methods for engaging with this group to ensure that responsible behaviour messages can be understood and acted upon.

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<sup>11</sup> Towards Responsible use: Influencing behaviour in the countryside, 2004, Scottish Natural Heritage.

<sup>12</sup> Cairngorms Mountain Recreation Survey, 1998, Scottish Natural Heritage.

### **OAS Policy 5: Increasing understanding of rights and responsibilities**

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

- 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;
- Recreational users and land managers will be encouraged to take forward programmes of promotional activity relating to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and promote high standards and good practice amongst each peer group;
- 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;
- Members of the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum will be encouraged to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code amongst their respective peer groups and learn from the issues that have been resolved, disseminating good practice more widely;
- All those people who have professional contact with people who take access in the National Park will be encouraged to actively promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;
- The National Park will be an exemplar of good practice in the provision of advice on responsible access in environmentally sensitive areas;
- Ranger services will have a key role in providing regular and focussed inter-actions between people from local communities, visitors and land managers;
- All parties will be encouraged to report problems or issues to the National Park Authority who will take steps to resolve them;
- 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;
- 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.

### **Managing outdoor access at sensitive sites**

- 4.27 The Cairngorms National Park is rich both environmentally and culturally: two attributes that attract large numbers to come to and enjoy this special place and which provide a rich backdrop for people who live and work in the National Park. Some parts of the National Park are, however, especially sensitive to disturbance or are easily damaged and therefore careful planning, management and promotion is required.
- 4.28 A holistic approach is required for the management of access that takes into account the prevention of damage to natural and cultural heritage sites within the constraints of the new rights of responsible access. Such an approach will

help reduce existing negative impacts through positive promotion of robust areas and paths, and through encouraging responsible behaviour by providing appropriate interpretation and advice about minimising adverse impacts. The existing regulatory framework is already well established for formally protected sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and for developments that require planning permission or other consents.

- 4.29 The National Park provides an ideal setting to develop new techniques or approaches to the management of access at sensitive sites and the lessons learned are likely to have significance beyond the boundaries of the National Park. It will be important therefore to promote such innovation and to share information with other interested parties.

#### **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:

- 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;
- Where recreational use is currently having a negative impact, consideration should be given to promotion of alternative, more robust sites;
- Best practice standards in relation to infrastructure design, construction and management should be used at all sensitive sites;
- 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;
- 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.

#### **Organised outdoor access events**

- 4.30 A number of organised events already take place in the National Park every year, bringing enjoyment to many people and valuable income to local businesses. Many organised events rely on access rights, for example sponsored walks and cycles, hill races and some competitions. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code provides guidance on the special care that organisers should take when planning such events. In some circumstances permission is required from the land manager before an event takes place. If well planned (in terms of site location, land manager liaison, time of year, etc.) these events cause few problems and can contribute towards ensuring the National Park is providing positive experiences for all users.
- 4.31 However, a number of concerns have been expressed by event organisers, land managers and concerned third parties on the staging of such events.

There is a perception that the number of events is increasing and that the sorts of problems described below are becoming more common. These include concerns from:

- land managers about lack of contact or late contact from event organisers, environmental damage, disturbance to land management activities and repeated request to use the same sites;
- mountain users about the perceived increase in mass competitive and sponsored events on the plateau and their effects on the wild qualities of the area;
- a range of parties about the impacts on the natural heritage and on other people's enjoyment of the Park;
- event organisers about land managers restricting access to the land through placement of conditions that do not relate to land management operations or environmental sensitivities;
- event organisers that decisions are being made to exclude events with no robust justification;
- a number of different parties about the need for interested stakeholders to get together from time to time to discuss particular event proposals.

***Case study: Scottish Orienteering Association***

The Scottish Orienteering Association has developed guidance for all of their member groups which encourages early liaison with land managers and other interested parties. As a consequence they have well run and organised events that have little impact on the ground and, in the case of larger events, have very positive impacts on the local economy.

- 4.32 The length of lead in time that is required to ensure an effective dialogue takes place and all appropriate management measures installed will vary depending on the scale of the event, the number of parties involved in discussions and the sensitivities of the area involved. As a general rule, for large scale events anything up to a year or more may be an appropriate lead in time.



### **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 National 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:

- guide events away from the most environmentally sensitive sites (including the higher ground in the Central Cairngorms and Lochnagar/Whitemouth massifs) and other areas which suffer from excessive pressure;
- 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;
- encourage the use of environmental impact studies to help assess the impacts of events on the environment in order to guide future decision making;
- minimise conflicts with other recreational users and their enjoyment of the National Park's special qualities;
- promote early dialogue between event organisers, land managers and all other interested parties so that appropriate mitigation measures can be adopted; and
- encourage participants in events to behave responsibly and to use the events to actively promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;

### **Managing recreational impacts at popular countryside sites**

- 4.33 Certain areas within the National Park are subject to greater recreational pressures than others. Often these pressures are greatest at popular setting-off points or scenic places, close to roads. As a consequence, recreational impacts are often concentrated in relatively small geographical areas that require substantial management input. In some cases these pressures can cause damage to the natural or cultural heritage, impact on land management operations and/or impact on other people's enjoyment of the area.
- 4.34 Fortunately, as a result of previous work, the National Park already benefits from a wide range of management approaches to deal with such impacts and the relevant land managers already have considerable experience. The measures used include the deployment of ranger services; provision of visitor information and signs; the promotion of appropriate routes and facilities for a range of users; the provision of public toilets and targeted repair and maintenance effort.
- 4.35 In developing management prescriptions to deal further with these issues it will be important to take a holistic view of access within the National Park to ensure that any problems are not displaced to other areas and that the

recreational experience continues to be of high quality. Careful evaluation of all possible impacts on any form of management intervention will need to form part of the assessment process. The Management for People system, developed by SNH<sup>13</sup>, provides a useful framework for undertaking this work. The system and its associated toolkit help site managers to put people to the front of the planning system, providing a framework for gathering visitor information and meeting the needs of visitors on a site by site basis.

- 4.36 The most significant issues that fall within this heading and which currently are not well managed relate to the impacts of camping on unmanaged sites. At a few locations in the National Park such camping takes place with so many people participating that, at times, there is a detrimental impact on health and safety, the environment and other people's enjoyment of the National Park. Generally, such camping, often facilitated by motorised access and close to roads, is questionable whether it is within the definition of "wild camping"<sup>14</sup> described in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which refers to camping well away from roads. In these areas there is typically a scarcity of managed camping facilities to which people can be directed and this will need to be addressed if the problem is to be resolved.

#### **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 National 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 system<sup>13</sup> should be used at popular countryside sites within the National Park where possible. In relation to camping at un-managed sites the policy in the National Park is based on the following principles:

- positive management measures should be adopted to discourage roadside camping (except in the circumstances prescribed in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code);
- 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;
- direct involvement of the relevant ranger service in the area to provide assistance to land managers where there are problems; and
- development, in association with land managers and appropriate representative bodies, of signage and other written material that explains the problems and encourages responsible behaviour.

<sup>13</sup> Management for People, 2004, Scottish Natural Heritage .

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Outdoor Access Code, 2004, Scottish Natural Heritage, page 115.

## Car parking charges

- 4.37 There is a variety of different approaches in the National Park to charging for parking at countryside sites. There is currently no policy for this at National Park level although general encouragement is made to develop visitor payback schemes in the approved Cairngorms National Park Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
- 4.38 While the creation of new car-parks will be covered by the development planning process (i.e. the Local Plan and planning applications), the charging regime at car parks is outwith the scope of planning control. There are therefore limited opportunities to directly influence the scope and scale of parking charges. Where there is to be public funding for the development or running of facilities there may be greater opportunities to influence the scale of fees and the use to which the revenue generated is put. The development of Park-wide policy will help to establish appropriate standards for the National Park.

### **Case study: Glen Muick**

Car parking at Glen Muick was previously unregulated which, on occasions, led to serious traffic problems with verges being used on a single track road, lack of turning spaces and consequent dangers to pedestrians and road users. Under the auspices of the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) a purpose built car park was created and a charge introduced for parking. The revenue generated from the car park is recycled into path works accounts for some £35,000 (in 2006) of new money being re-invested in the area and is traceable through the annual accounts of UDAT.

### **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:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.
- 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;
- Where possible, car park charges should be integrated with public transport provision, for example through integrated ticketing for parking and bus use; and
- 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**

### **Developing appropriate visitor information about outdoor access opportunities**

4.39 There are a large number of individuals and organisations involved in promoting visitor information within the National Park. Such information can take a wide range of formats including leaflets, signs, websites, interpretation panels and guidebooks. To date, there has been no consistent approach taken to the supply of information across the National Park, to the validation of its accuracy nor how various information sources can link together to provide residents and visitors with the type of information they require. This has resulted in the current situation where individually, there exists some very useful sources of information but, taken as a whole, there is a very fragmented approach that does not serve the public, nor the National Park, well.

- 4.40 The National Park's Sustainable Tourism Strategy has already recognised this lack of cohesion in the provision of visitor information. This has been reflected in the Priorities for Action within the National Park Plan on Developing Awareness and Understanding of the Park and on Making Tourism and Businesses Sustainable.
- 4.41 The production of the Cairngorms Explorer booklet, which provides for the first time public transport timetables and information about recreation opportunities across the National Park, has proved very popular. Yet for those wishing to plan a variety of trips over several days there is no single point of contact or publication that fulfils this role. Similarly, outlets such as visitor centres and Tourist Information Centres are frequently challenged to provide information about the full range of recreational opportunities that exist in their immediate area and across the National Park.
- 4.42 The more adventurous types of recreation such as downhill mountain biking, rock or ice climbing and white water canoeing are reasonably well catered for through specialist publications and websites. The less adventurous types of recreation do not fare so well, although locally there are some very good examples of network promotion. The Upper Deeside Access Trust and Angus Council illustrate this latter point well through provision of a website with a choice of routes, clear descriptions and a downloadable map. Forestry Commission Scotland and some estates, such as Rothiemurchus and Glenlivet, have produced good quality leaflets and visitor information. The excellent leaflets that have been produced for some communities (for example in Deeside and in parts of Badenoch and Strathspey) are, unfortunately, not available for communities across the whole National Park.
- 4.43 As a general rule, easy recreational cycling is not well promoted and information is hard to come by, although there are many suitable places where this takes place. Glenlivet and Rothiemurchus Estates are notable exceptions as they feature a range of cycling opportunities on their websites as well as providing appropriate literature.
- 4.44 For the less able, information on which paths are fully accessible and what obstacles or barriers might be encountered on a route is generally poor. There are relatively few paths that can be accessed by those with particular mobility difficulties and fewer still that have accurate route descriptions that would enable less able people to make informed choices as to whether a route is suitable for them.
- 4.45 The target audience for some of the information provided should include those who currently do not walk, cycle, ride or paddle. The reasons why people do not undertake these activities are varied and can include lack of knowledge and confidence. In trying to encourage this group to get out and about it will be important to develop policies and provide information that can overcome their concerns.

### **Case study: Walking on wheels**

A new book, *Walking on Wheels*, produced as a guide for wheel chair users, (published by Cualann Press in 2006) provides information on 50 "wheel-friendly" trails in Scotland, including a chapter on the National Park. The descriptions are easy to follow and the grading system used makes it very clear to readers the type of surface and gradients that will be encountered. Information is provided on the natural and cultural heritage that can be experienced on route, adjacent car parking and accessible toilets.

### **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 National Park is based on the following principles, that there should be:

- 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;
- 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;
- a hierarchy of more general information about opportunities at Park-wide level and more specific information about parts of the National Park;
- 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;
- 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 National Park, and where appropriate, using the National Park brand;
- 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
- 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.

## Providing appropriate way-marking

- 4.46 Whilst a number of organisations and communities have developed their own way-marking system for routes, there are no agreed standards and consequently the range of information provided is variable. Many short walks (1 to 2 miles) in particular generally lack effective way-marking and frequently rely on local knowledge or map reading skills. Improving way-marking is particularly important if we are to encourage less active people and other excluded groups to undertake some moderate form of exercise. Providing well signposted and way-marked routes would remove a major existing obstacle from these excluded groups taking exercise.
- 4.47 Way-marking clearly has an important role to play in helping people to find their way around but can also detract from some visitors' experience. The mountain areas of the Cairngorms have been influenced by the hand of man over many centuries but the landscape is generally devoid of such obvious and intrusive infrastructure as way-marking posts. There is also the need to consider the appropriateness of encouraging people into remote areas where they may not have the necessary skills or knowledge to find their way back to safety should the weather suddenly change or the party gets into difficulty. The SNH publication, "Management for People"<sup>15</sup> will assist in determining the appropriateness of way-marking to the various user types identified above.

### **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:

- 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;
- Way-marking information must include a direction pointer, destination and approximate distance at the start of the route;
- It should be easy to find the start of promoted paths from the heart of nearby communities;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

<sup>15</sup> Management for People, 2004, Scottish Natural Heritage

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

### **Improving public transport links**

- 4.48 There are large variations in the availability and suitability of public transport both to and within the National Park. A lack of accessible public transport excludes some social groups and places a financial burden on households who need to then buy a car. In addition, there are clear environmental benefits from the use of public transport and, where these can be linked to walking and cycling routes, to the health of those who both reside in and visit the National Park. Lack of knowledge about the availability and frequency of public transport can also be a factor which influences the public to opt for the car option and therefore information provision also has an important role to play in encouraging use of public transport. This issue is addressed in Action Theme 3.
- 4.49 At present there is a bus and rail network connecting the communities on the western side of the National Park along the A9. These also provide links to most of the major urban settlements in Scotland. Other parts of the National Park are served by bus networks, mainly connecting settlements. Some parts of the National Park are not well served and historically there has been poor provision between the east and west of the National Park; between Strathspey and Strathdon or Deeside; and on the A93 between Braemar and Spittle of Glenshee or Pitlochry. In 2006 significant progress has been made with implementation of plans to address these shortfalls, at least on a seasonal basis. Cycle carriage is generally limited on public transport both from and to the National Park and in the National Park.
- 4.50 Many of the popular setting off or return points for walking and cycling are not particularly well served by public transport and this has resulted in reliance on cars and, at times, congestion on roads not designed for high numbers. Such problems are most significant in glens with “dead end” roads. Mitigating measures to date have mainly involved the creation of car parks and facilities lower down the glens and promotion of alternative destinations in the area.
- 4.51 To better understand the current shortcomings in public transport provision a transport audit has been undertaken. This has highlighted the need for better passenger information, integrated ticketing, visitor oriented packages (i.e. including travel and attraction) and addressing recreational gaps in services both geographically and over the week.



### **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 National Park is based on the following principles:

- 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.
- 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.
- Adequate cycle carriage provision should be encouraged on all public transport to, from and around the National Park.
- Public transport should cater for the less able and provide carriage for wheelchairs and pushchairs;
- Public transport should specifically cater for a wide variety of sports equipment including skis, snowboards and large rucksacks.
- The further development of bus routes that link communities to popular setting off points for outdoor access will be encouraged;
- There should be more sustainable modal choices at car parks, including better public transport information which will encourage car users to leave their cars.
- More integrated ticketing is required between different transport modes and between visitor attractions and transport.
- Opportunities to revise public transport routes and service times in line with identified need and demand will be investigated and progressed, as appropriate; and
- Acknowledgement should be given to the role of community transport and its place alongside public transport.

### **Safer cycling opportunities**

4.52 Cycling is a popular activity within the Park and, as well as a leisure activity, serves as a practical and sustainable means of transport for school children and workers. A number of communities are well served by quiet roads and safe routes to school but for others, the prospect of negotiating busy and fast roads acts as a complete deterrent.

### **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:

- cyclists require more priority lanes and safer routes to school as well as routes that are professionally engineered;
- reductions in vehicular speed limits on functional cycling networks can increase safety; and
- 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**

- 4.53 Lack of physical activity has been described as, ‘the silent epidemic of our times’ with over 60% of the Scottish population not active enough to benefit their health. This contributes significantly to Scotland’s poor health record in relation to coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes and many cancers.<sup>16</sup> However, Scotland is also acknowledged as a world leader in tackling physical activity by developing the first national Physical Activity Strategy, ‘Let’s Make Scotland More Active.’<sup>17</sup> The National Park can make a significant contribution to the implementation of this strategy.
- 4.54 ‘Let’s Make Scotland More Active’ recognises that inactive people moving to just 30 minutes of moderate activity per day, such as brisk walking can, for example:
- cut the risk of coronary heart disease by 50%;
  - reduce the risk of colon cancer (inactive people are 3.6 times more at risk than active people);
  - cut the risk of Type 2 diabetes by 50%; and
  - be more effective than drugs for treating mild to moderate depression
- 4.55 Both national and international research supports walking as being the most appropriate activity to promote to encourage inactive people to become active. Meanwhile work undertaken by the Paths to Health Project across Scotland has identified that social/peer support is the most significant factor in encouraging inactive people to walk more. Very recent research<sup>18</sup> in Scotland has gathered new information about the barriers to participation in exercise and physical activity. This points to the role that paths and other access opportunities have in building opportunities for access into people’s lives.

<sup>16</sup> ISD Scotland – (formerly known as Scottish Health Statistics)

<sup>17</sup> A Strategy for Physical Activity, 2003, Physical Activity Taskforce

<sup>18</sup> Ipsos MORI’s Scottish Social Policy Monitor

### **Case Study: Sport Exercise and Physical Activity: Public Participation, Barriers and Attitudes**

The tourism Culture and Sports Group of the Scottish Executive commissioned a module of questions through Ipsos MORI's<sup>19</sup> Scottish Social Policy Monitor. The questions examined the public's participation in sport, exercise and physical activity, barriers to participation, and their attitudes towards sport and physical activity. The research consisted of a representative survey of 2,077 adults interviewed in-home between January and June 2006. It was designed to inform policies aimed at increasing the proportion of the Scottish population who exercised regularly. The main findings were:

- Given that experts suggest 30 minutes activity on most days, findings show that the majority of people, 65%, are not exercising enough: 27% exercise just once or twice a week, 7% just once or twice a month, 9% less often than once a month and 22% never exercise;
- There are clear demographic differences between those who exercise regularly and those who do not. Participation is higher among younger people, men, those living in the least deprived areas and those in higher income households;
- By far the biggest barrier to participation are lack of time and poor health;
- Participation levels drop off after the age of around 25 – when people starting getting jobs, having families, etc. When they might be able to start increasing their activity levels, once their children are older and work commitments lessen, health problems start to become a barrier;
- Motivational barriers (e.g. "I just can't be bothered" or "wouldn't enjoy it") and barriers relating to the availability and accessibility of facilities (e.g. cost, proximity to, or quality of facilities) impact on some people but are considerably less important overall than lack of time and poor health;
- Attitudes towards physical activity are very positive. This suggests that efforts to increase participation are best focussed on making it easier for people – such as advising on how exercise can be fitted in to the daily routine – rather than persuading them of the benefits.

4.56 There already are some schemes within the National Park that have encouraged people to become more active. These include the Upper Deeside Walks to Health scheme and "Step it Up Highland" which operates in a number of villages in Badenoch and Strathspey. The benefits of such

<sup>19</sup> Ipsos MORI are a company who undertake social research

schemes are considerable and include improved physical health and mental wellbeing of participants and the creation of opportunities for new people to meet and to get involved in community based activities, thereby contributing to community development and social inclusion. The presence of a good network of people living locally who know where to go for a pleasant short walk can also have considerable tourism benefits and the potential for the National Park to market itself as a healthy destination merits further exploration. Whilst these schemes are proving successful, at present they only cover a minority of communities within the National Park.

- 4.57 The Paths to Health Project encourages the setting up of local schemes through training and advice and targeted financial support. National Health Service (NHS) health promotions are equally keen to assist in encouraging local groups although NHS Highland and Grampian may have different views about how best to take this work forwards. A GP referral scheme (Active Referral) encourages health professionals to direct patients to activities such as walking groups where they can join others in taking exercise. To assist this process a Physical Activity Directory was produced by CNPA/NHS Highland in 2005. This was aimed at GPs, other health professionals and the general public to highlight the variety of physical activities available in Badenoch and Strathspey. Rambler groups throughout Scotland can deliver these Path to Health programmes.
- 4.58 The Paths to Health Project has also developed a pedometer pack for health professionals which can be supported with local information about where to walk. This pack has been successfully evaluated in 21 Primary Health Care settings by Strathclyde University. Paths to Health have also been piloting a number of workplace health initiatives which encourage employees to walk at lunch time as well as to and from work. Such approaches can have health and environmental benefits.
- 4.59 It may also be useful to promote the concept of “Active travel” where the journey to and from the destination becomes part of the process of active exercise. For example, building in an element of exercise into every day journeys can contribute to an individual’s health and fitness. This enables physical activity to be integrated with ever day life and therefore become embedded in a routine that provides health benefits to all involved.
- 4.60 Riding for the disabled provides a valuable outdoor experience for individuals who would otherwise have difficulty accessing the countryside. As well as the emotional benefits from such exercise there are physical health and fitness advantages to such users.

#### **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 National Park is based on the following principles:

- 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;
- encouragement of use of active referrals from GPs to walking or other physical activity clubs; and
- some marketing activity that is oriented to promote the National Park as a 'healthy destination'.
- 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.

## **5 ACTION MECHANISMS**

### **Introduction**

- 5.1 It is not possible, nor would it be beneficial, to list all of the individuals and organisations that have a role to play in the management of outdoor access. This section focuses on the principal groups of people who will be involved and explains the role which it will be necessary for them to play for the successful delivery of the Strategy.
- 5.2 This Section should be considered along with the Sections on Action Themes and Policies, Action Areas, and the Park-wide Action Plan to determine how the issues will be addressed over the next 5 year period. For example, the Policies in Section 4 should be used to guide decision making by all of the relevant individuals and organisations in the National Park.

### **Cairngorms National Park Authority Staff**

- 5.3 CNPA staff will focus on implementation of the core duties of the Park Authority, development of strategic work and integration of outdoor access work with other activities of the Park Authority. The work associated with the four legal duties of the Park Authority (see Section 2) will take a high priority. Other work will include the allocation of funds for path repair and maintenance and development of policy and best practice advice. CNPA staff will also lead on those aspects of the Strategy relating to Transport and Health.

### **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum**

- 5.4 The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) was established in March 2005 and has already offered constructive advice on a number of issues to the Park Authority and others.
- 5.5 The Forum meets on a 10 week cycle at different locations throughout the National Park. The Forum is made up of 21 individuals with a wide range of knowledge and experience drawn from four stakeholder groups – land managers, community interests, recreational users and public agencies. The objectives and functions of the Forum are:
- a) To act as the local access forum for Cairngorms National Park and to undertake the functions of that body in terms of Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;
  - b) To advise Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on strategic access issues and the drawing up and adoption of a Core Paths Plan in terms of its responsibility under Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;
  - c) To advise the CNPA in the preparation of its Outdoor Access Strategy;

- d) To advise the CNPA and any other person or body consulting it, on the existence and delineation of rights of way and the exercise of access rights;
- e) To promote responsible access and the responsible management of land for access through assisting the CNPA in publicising the Scottish Outdoor Access Code;
- f) To promote discussion and the sharing of knowledge, awareness and good practice in outdoor access matters;
- g) To support the provision of infrastructure that improves responsible access to the countryside for all; and
- h) To offer advice that will assist in the resolution of outdoor access disputes.

## **Ranger Services**

- 5.6 There are 13 ranger services operating within the National Park. None of these services is directly managed by the Park Authority. The employers are either privately owned estates, charitable bodies, local authorities or other public bodies. Most ranger services are assisted financially by SNH, either through grant aid or as part of a management agreement.
- 5.7 The role currently played by ranger services in management of outdoor access across the National Park is variable. Rangers employed on specific estates (or similar geographic units) are perhaps most actively engaged at present but only in relation to their well-defined area of ground. There they promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to visitors, address any site specific matters and ensure that visitors and land managers (generally their employer) are aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- 5.8 Rangers working over wider areas of the National Park (generally those employed by local authorities) have more flexibility in the areas of ground on which they operate and therefore can play a wider role, in addition to that described above. Significant attention is generally paid to sites owned or directly managed by the respective local authority.
- 5.9 At the time of writing a review is under way of the various options for management arrangements of rangers in the National Park. Decisions on the future funding and management of Ranger Services will be taken, in consultation with the relevant partner organisations, in early 2007. In addition SNH commenced a national review of rangers in 2006. Both of these processes may result in further changes to the roles that rangers play in the management of outdoor access.
- 5.10 In the future a more consistent and proactive role in the management of outdoor access within the National Park is envisaged with the 3 types of Ranger services assisting with the management of outdoor access. These are summarised in the Figure 5.1 below.

**Figure 5.1 – Potential Management Role for Ranger Services within the National Park**

National Park Plan Priority for Action	Ranger Services		
	Site-based	Area-based	Community-based
	<i>e.g. Glen Tanar &amp; Rothiemurchus. Their role is focussed at and about their site. Principal customer groups are land managers and visitors.</i>	<i>e.g. Aberdeenshire or Highland Council. Their role is focussed over a wider area, outwith the areas covered by Site-based services. Principal customer groups are communities and land managers.</i>	<i>e.g. Nethy Bridge (seasonal). Their role is focused in and around their community of place. Principal customer groups are communities and visitors.</i>
<b>1. Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in promoting high quality opportunities for outdoor access.</li> <li>• Key role in promoting responsible behaviour on their sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in promoting high quality opportunities for outdoor access.</li> <li>• Key role in upholding access rights.</li> <li>• Key role in promoting responsible behaviour.</li> <li>• Key role in assisting land managers without Site based ranger services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in promoting high quality opportunities for outdoor access.</li> <li>• Key role in promoting responsible behaviour on their sites.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in providing a highly visible, front face for the National Park</li> <li>• Key role in connecting land managers, visitors and communities to the National Park.</li> <li>• Key role in providing information and promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area.</li> <li>• Key role in encouraging people to become ambassadors for the Cairngorms National Park, especially through volunteer programmes and the John Muir Award.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in providing a highly visible, front face for the National Park</li> <li>• Key role in connecting land managers, visitors and communities to the National Park.</li> <li>• Key role in providing information and promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area.</li> <li>• Key role in encouraging people to become ambassadors for the Cairngorms National Park, especially through volunteer programmes and the John Muir Award.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key role in providing a highly visible, front face for the National Park</li> <li>• Key role in connecting land managers, visitors and communities to the National Park.</li> <li>• Key role in providing information and promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area.</li> <li>• Key role in encouraging people to become ambassadors for the Cairngorms National Park, especially through volunteer programmes and the John Muir Award.</li> </ul>



## Delivery mechanism for path repair, maintenance and improvement programmes

- 5.11 Within the National Park Plan's Priority for Action on Outdoor Access there is a proposal to create a dedicated Trust, or similar body, to allow partners to contribute towards agreed priority work programmes of path repair, maintenance and improvement.
- 5.12 Experience in the Cairngorms and elsewhere in Scotland has shown that there can be considerable advantages in using a Trust or other similar mechanism to assemble funding programmes spanning several years and running the project management of the works. The particular advantages include development of commitment from a variety of funding partners around an agreed set of goals and encouragement of the planning of work programmes over a number of years. A Trust, being an independent entity and frequently holding charitable status, is also often a good mechanism for delivery of visitor payback initiatives and it is relatively easier for it to access funds from charitable sources. The Trust can also be flexible and entrepreneurial in its approach, directing resources to certain parts of its geographic area as priorities demand – for example working with very light touch where there is existing capacity at local level and taking more of a delivery role in other parts. There are of course some potential disadvantages, including:
- Perceived duplication of overlapping Trusts;
  - Administration and core costs need to be found; and
  - Difficulties operating over a large geographic area.
- 5.13 There are essentially two alternative courses of action to deliver the same objective but each has more substantial disadvantages. One option would be that the Park Authority recruit further staff with the skills to plan, supervise and manage substantial path repair programmes. This would have some advantages (including direct control of delivery by the Park Authority) but there would also be difficulties:
- generating significant partnership “buy-in” to programmes of work;
  - accessing funds from charitable sources;
  - managing large multi-year work programmes with sufficient flexibility between years;
  - accessing funds from visitor payback schemes or from sales of Park merchandise.
- 5.14 The second alternative course of action would be to work through the wide range of other smaller Trusts and community companies already in existence. Again there are some advantages in terms of working with existing structures but there are significant disadvantages, including:
- very unlikely to provide necessary degree of coordination across the National Park;

- lack of the specialised skills that are needed to effectively manage work programmes and very varied capacity for delivery, therefore requiring extensive support; and
  - significant competition for resources between smaller Trusts likely to lead to a fragmented approach, not directed to Park-wide priorities
  - difficulties accessing funds from visitor payback schemes or from sales of National Park merchandise.
- 5.15 There is already an excellent example of an existing Trust within the National Park in the Upper Deeside Access Trust who have very successfully bid for and managed substantial, path improvement programmes spanning several years. The Trust has operated over a wide area, working in partnership with respective land managers in both public and private sector to deliver agreed outputs. Public feedback about such works has been extremely positive.
- 5.16 Similarly the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has pioneered techniques of upland path repair and maintenance using a dedicated peripatetic team covering a range of mountain properties in their ownership. This approach has allowed effective programmes of pre-emptive “light touch” work to be undertaken by highly skilled teams as part of larger path restoration programmes. A Park-wide Trust would need to reflect the different philosophy and styles of path repair in low and high ground settings and build on NTS’s experience.
- 5.17 Work is ongoing by Park Authority staff to assess the potential for the use of a Park-wide Trust or similar delivery mechanism within the National Park and, at present, this is the favoured option. It is envisaged that such a Trust could operate as a Company Limited by Guarantee with a Board of Trustees which included representatives of the main funding organisations and some other interested parties. To attain charitable status it would need to apply to the recently empowered Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, demonstrate it had charitable objectives and provides a public benefit. Experience has shown that there are advantages in keeping the Board of Trustees small and having complementary mechanisms to bring in officers in the form of a management group. The combination of these structures, along with a dedicated staff would collectively bring the necessary finance, management, and corporate governance skills required to operate such a Trust.

## **Other mechanisms for delivering the Strategy**

- 5.18 **Community Based Trusts or Similar Organisations** - There are a number of small, community based organisations in and around the Cairngorms National Park which have been extremely successful in improving and maintaining local path networks to date. These local groups have good local knowledge of the current path networks and the types and levels of usage of the paths in their areas. These local groups could provide an effective lead for the Core Paths Planning community consultation exercises as well as assisting in guiding non core path network projects. Maintenance of path networks could be undertaken by such groups with overall co-ordination

provided by the Park Authority with support from the proposed Park-wide Trust.

- 5.19 **Local Authorities** - Although the statutory duties for outdoor access have moved from the local authorities to the National Park, there are still a number of discreet roles that are fulfilled by local authorities. These include providing access solutions that are within a road corridor, pavements, car parking and other related transport issues. Some local authorities own or directly manage some sites or structures with the National Park. There is a need for the Park Authority to work closely with each local authority to ensure that solutions that require a multi-agency approach are funded and co-ordinated effectively.
- 5.20 The same issues relate to the new **Transport Partnerships**. The North East Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS) and the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) which are now statutory bodies and who work to pursue improved transport services and infrastructure in their areas. NESTRANS and HITRANS both operate within the Cairngorms National Park area. Joint working between the CNPA, Local Authority transport departments and such bodies is essential to deliver actions on public transport.
- 5.21 **Health professionals** - Implementation of this Strategy in relation to health will require partnership working with those directly in touch with the target audience - health professionals, voluntary health sector, community organisations, etc. While organisations such as Step it Up Highland and the Deeside walking initiative can assist the Park in meeting health objectives there may be merit in establishing a standing group to advise on the best way forward.

## Other stakeholders

- 5.22 **Land Managers** - There are a large number of different land managers within the Cairngorms National Park area and many provide excellent outdoor access opportunities on their land, some which are managed and maintained without public support. The Core Paths Plan process may present opportunities for land managers to guide recreational users onto areas of their land which are more appropriate. Land managers also have the opportunity to develop access opportunities on their land through Land Management Contracts. It is acknowledged that the current amount of funding available through Tier 2 would not be sufficient to include all paths within each farm unit. It will, however, provide the first opportunity for land managers to receive a payment for access related maintenance. Future funding for public benefits associated with land management are likely to encourage co-operative bids from a number of adjacent land managers which may offer even greater benefits for overall route management. The Park Authority, as access authority, will provide pre-application information and advice to land managers to encourage the integration of Land Management Contract access options with strategic Park-wide access priorities.

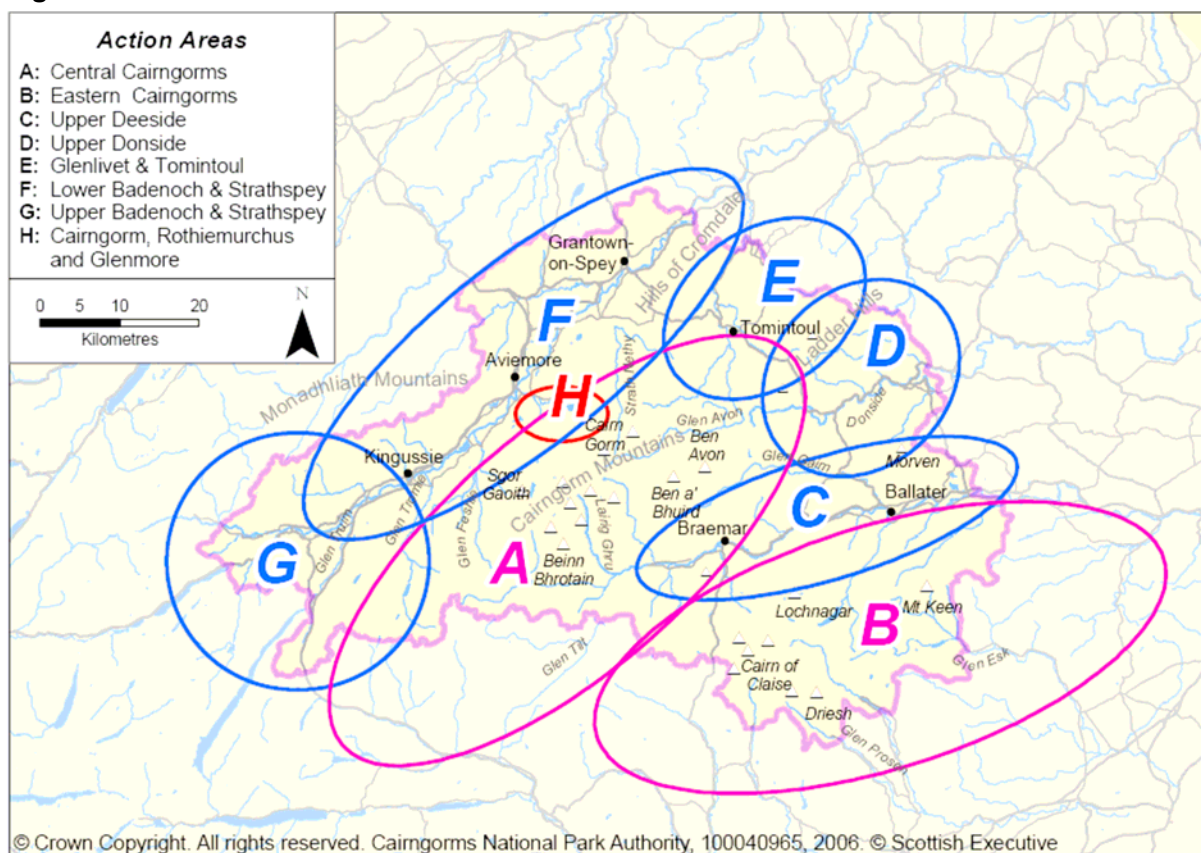
- 5.23 **Local Businesses** - There are already many businesses based on the outdoor access resource within the National Park. Local businesses and business associations are increasingly recognising the benefits of path networks as a tourist attraction and something which is beneficial to their business. This is well demonstrated by the number of locally led walking festivals around the National Park. It will be important for the CNPA to highlight demand on which new business opportunities could be based and potential for new linkages between services or greater coordination. One innovative and successful scheme of path sponsorship is currently in place at Nethy Bridge and this may be a useful model to use across the Cairngorms National Park. Similarly a new initiative in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, the Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Ltd, may result in a significant new income stream for projects, some of which may be available for outdoor access related work and may also be able to assist in co-ordinating visitor information services.
- 5.24 **Public agencies** – The delivery of the Strategy will help to meet the objectives of public agencies in a wide range of fields including tourism, health promotion, forestry, economic development, sport promotion and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. It will be important to keep the relevant public agencies fully involved in the implementation of this Strategy so that the widest range of benefits can be realised.
- 5.25 **Groups to Share Good Practice locally** - The numerous initiatives relating to outdoor access at a local level and the degree of enthusiasm for such work has prompted a demand for groups that share information and experience. A good model for such a group is the Deeside Access Group which currently meets twice a year with the chairmanship shared between the Park Authority and Aberdeenshire Council. It is envisaged that the Park Authority could play a useful role in convening one or more similar groups so that the entire Park is covered. These more local groups for practitioners would complement the work of the Local Outdoor Access Forum. More local groups representing different types of recreation will also be a useful resource in delivering the themes of the Outdoor Access Strategy.

## 6 ACTION AREAS

### Introduction

6.1 Action Areas have been identified to provide a more detailed spatial dimension to this Strategy. It should be noted that the Action Themes and Policies identified in Section 4 relate to the whole National Park. The specific issues and priorities identified for Action Areas in this Section should therefore be viewed as complementary to those policies.

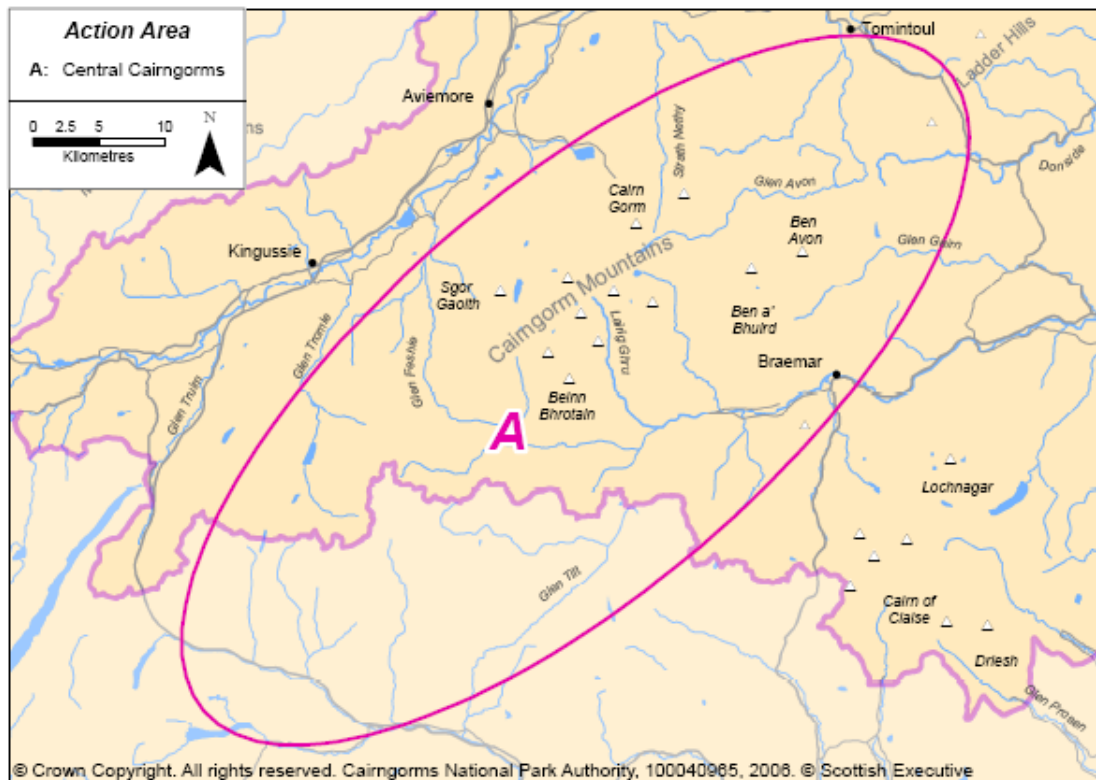
**Figure 6.1 - Action Areas**



6.2 Figure 6.1 provides an illustration of the areas within the Park that are considered to have distinct characteristics and requirements in terms of outdoor access. The areas overlap with one another and extend beyond the Park. They are intended to be general areas only and the lines do not represent specific changes in landscape or character on the ground. The colours used in the map are to assist with visual representation only and do not carry any prioritised significance.

## Action Area A: The Central Cairngorms

Figure 6.2 - Action Area A, Central Cairngorms



### Description

- 6.3 The Central Cairngorms are characterised by an upland landscape much of which lies within the montane zone (land above 600 metres). Twenty of the Munros (hills over 3,000ft) that exist within the National Park fall within Area A. The area is predominantly free of built development and inhabited settlements and is managed for forestry, deer and grouse shooting, nature conservation and recreation. The Rivers Dee and Don have their headwaters in the Central Cairngorms and many of the tributaries of the Spey including the Avon also run from the area. Loch Avon and Loch Einich are the largest water bodies in the area. The Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area (NSA) and the Cairngorm Mountains National Scenic Area fall within Area A as does the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve (NNR) together with the Cairngorms Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 6.4 A wide range of recreational activities take place in the area, providing an important resource for both local people and visitors. Numerous upland paths and mountain passes provide access through and onto the mountains. Many people value the area for its wild character and it is visited by people from all over the world. There are a large number of upland paths and tracks providing access throughout the area. Many of these tracks have historical significance and one or two can truly be described as iconic. The area can be

accessed from numerous setting off points, the most popular of these being at Coire Cas, which also provides access to the Cairngorm ski centre, and at the Linn of Dee.

### **Key outdoor access issues**

- 6.5 The upland area is an extremely fragile environment which is susceptible to damage from the cumulative impact of recreational users. There is a need to promote responsible behaviour and ensure that access to the high ground is not made easier in order to help minimise the potential environmental impacts. Paths should be maintained so that they provide a sound and attractive surface for users.
- 6.6 Access to the area by public transport is limited and most people generally arrive by car, requiring car-parking facilities. This can lead to the exclusion of people who do not have access to a vehicle. Paths close to car parks receive intensive use and generally need higher specification and maintenance regimes. One advantage of the use of such concentrated setting-off points is that visitor information is more readily targeted to the required audience than if parking was more dispersed. Such intensively managed paths can also provide a useful “taster” for the less adventurous or those with mobility problems for whom long walks are not possible.
- 6.7 This area is in demand from time to time by those wishing to organise mass participation events that rely on outdoor access rights. The sensitivity of the natural heritage and visitors’ enjoyment of the wild landscape character means that such events in this area can be problematic unless very carefully planned.
- 6.8 Most of the higher paths in this area have evolved from “desire lines.” Subsequent repair and maintenance has been designed and constructed for pedestrian use only. Cycling and horse use can have a negative impact on the path surface and drainage although it is recognised that hill riders have been undertaking high level, cross Cairngorms routes without negatively impacting on the natural heritage. It is also noted that some path construction techniques (such as pitching) can result in previously accessible routes becoming inaccessible to certain user types. Some of the higher paths have also proved difficult to repair with the standard techniques used on Scottish hill paths. For example, it has been difficult to determine a suitable path line that users would follow on some of the broad Cairngorms ridges. Experimental work in the area and collective review of experience by practitioners has helped to address such issues.
- 6.9 The path repair process in the area is challenging, not least because of remoteness. In recent years an innovative approach has been taken through the use of temporary accommodation for path workers. The environmental sensitivity of the area also causes some difficulties for path managers. For example, the geological and geomorphological value of some sites has precluded the collection of stone for path repairs. SNH has developed useful guidelines to ease the planning process. Concerns have been expressed that

different approaches to path repair have been taken on different land management units within the Area. There is need to agree standards and styles that can be applied across the area.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

- Promotion of responsible behaviour to minimise impacts to the sensitive natural and cultural heritage of the Area;
- Development of a comprehensive understanding of path condition (building on the comprehensive work done on land owned by National Trust for Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and through area-wide surveying undertaken by the Upper Deeside Access Trust) in order to set priorities for repair and maintenance;
- Putting effective maintenance and pre-emptive repair regimes for paths in place, especially relating to previous capital repair works;
- Specifying and agreeing with partners standards and management styles for path repairs that are appropriate to the sensitive landscape character of the area and do not adversely impact on the sensitive habitats;
- Sourcing locally the minimum amount of materials where appropriate required for path repair/maintenance to minimise adverse effects on natural or cultural heritage;
- Further development of path repair techniques in the most difficult upland situations (for example, on broad, exposed ridges);
- Managing organised events so as to minimise adverse effects on the special qualities of the area and peoples' enjoyment of them.

## Action Area B: The Eastern Cairngorms

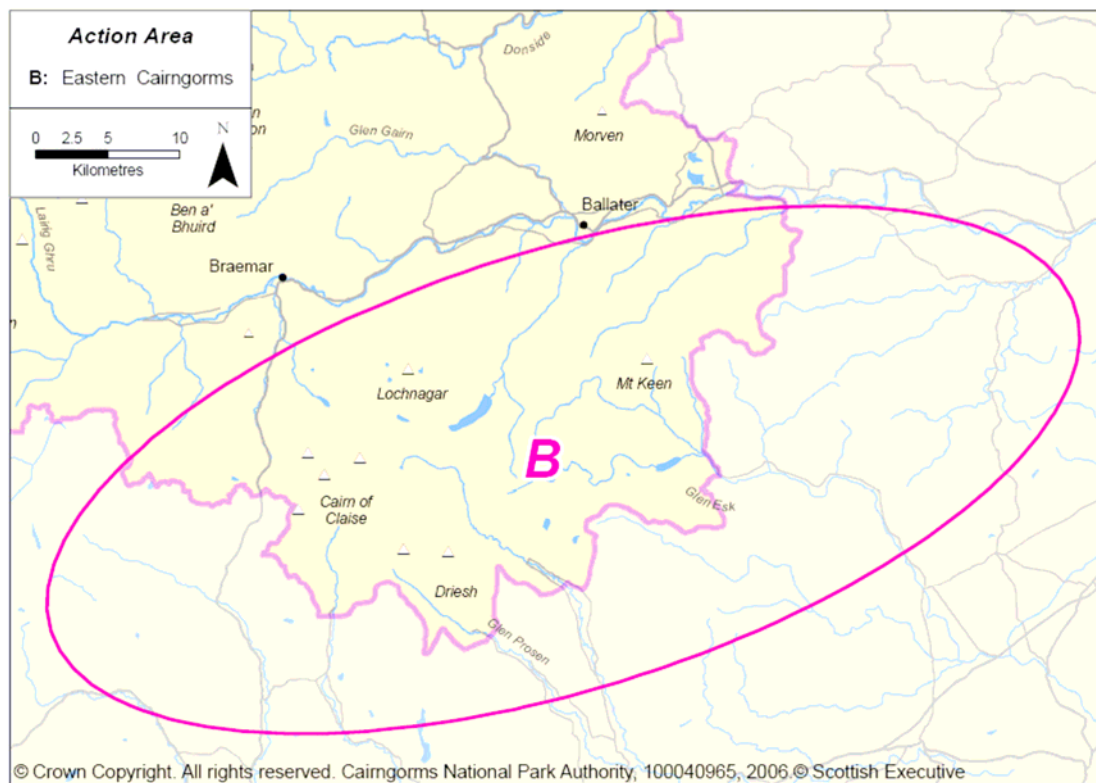
### Description

6.10 The Eastern Cairngorms have a similar landscape character to Area A. The Area is characterised by an upland landscape with numerous glens and rivers, the most notable of which are Glens Isla, Prosen, Clova, Doll and Esk to the south of the hills and Glens Tanar, Muick, Callater and Clunie to the north. The rivers in the area are tributaries to the Rivers Dee and to the North and South Esk. Loch Muick and Loch Lee are the largest water bodies. The Deeside and Lochnagar NSA falls within Area B as does the NNR at Glen Tanar and at Corrie Fee (previously Caenlochan NNR). There are a number of natural heritage sites in this area that are recognised for their importance at a European level. These include: Caenlochan SAC and SPA and Glen Tanar SAC and SPA. The area is sparsely populated with small numbers of scattered settlements in the glens, predominantly falling within Glen Tanar, Glen Muick and Glen Clova.



- 6.11 The Eastern Cairngorms are a popular location for recreational users from much of Angus and Aberdeenshire as well as farther afield. The glens provide a range of opportunities with both low and high level options. There are a number of old drove roads and vindicated Rights of Way in the area providing passes through the mountains between the Angus Glens in the south and Deeside in the north. Glenshee ski centre lies to the east of the Area. The outdoor access resource for walkers has been strengthened considerably over the last few years as result of the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project which came to an end in late 2006.

**Figure 6.3 - Action Area B, Eastern Cairngorms**



### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.12 Many of the same issues described for the Central Cairngorms also apply to this Area. The upland area is a fragile environment which can be susceptible to damage by recreational users. Some road-side camping in Glen Clunie has led to problems with rubbish, waste, fires and damage to the natural heritage.
- 6.13 The management and maintenance of a large number of upland paths and tracks of the Eastern Cairngorms has been addressed through the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) and through specifically funded projects such as the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (ECAP). It is important that this work continues as part of a Park-wide approach to the management and maintenance of upland paths and tracks.

- 6.14 Again, as with the Central Cairngorms, access to the area by public transport is limited and people generally arrive by car requiring parking and causing intensive usage of paths and tracks in areas where car parking is available. This is particularly true at road heads such as Glen Doll and Glen Muick. This can lead to the exclusion of people who do not own their own vehicle and also the creation of 'honeypot' areas of high pressure access. Many of the popular walks in the area are through routes which may require transport at either end.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

- Promotion of responsible behaviour to minimise impacts to the sensitive natural and cultural heritage of the Area;
- Development of a comprehensive understanding of path condition (building on the comprehensive work done through the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project) in order to set priorities for repair and maintenance;
- Putting effective maintenance regimes for paths in place, especially relating to previous capital repair initiatives;
- Further development of path repair techniques in the most difficult upland situations (for example on exposed ridges);
- Sourcing locally the minimum amount of materials where appropriate required for path repair/maintenance to minimise adverse effects on natural or cultural heritage;
- Managing organised events so as to minimise adverse effects on the special qualities of the area and peoples' enjoyment of them; and
- Provision of suitably managed campsites in areas close to Braemar and in the Angus Glens to minimise problems caused in the area by excessive roadside camping and encouragement of Ranger services to liaise with campers to highlight compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

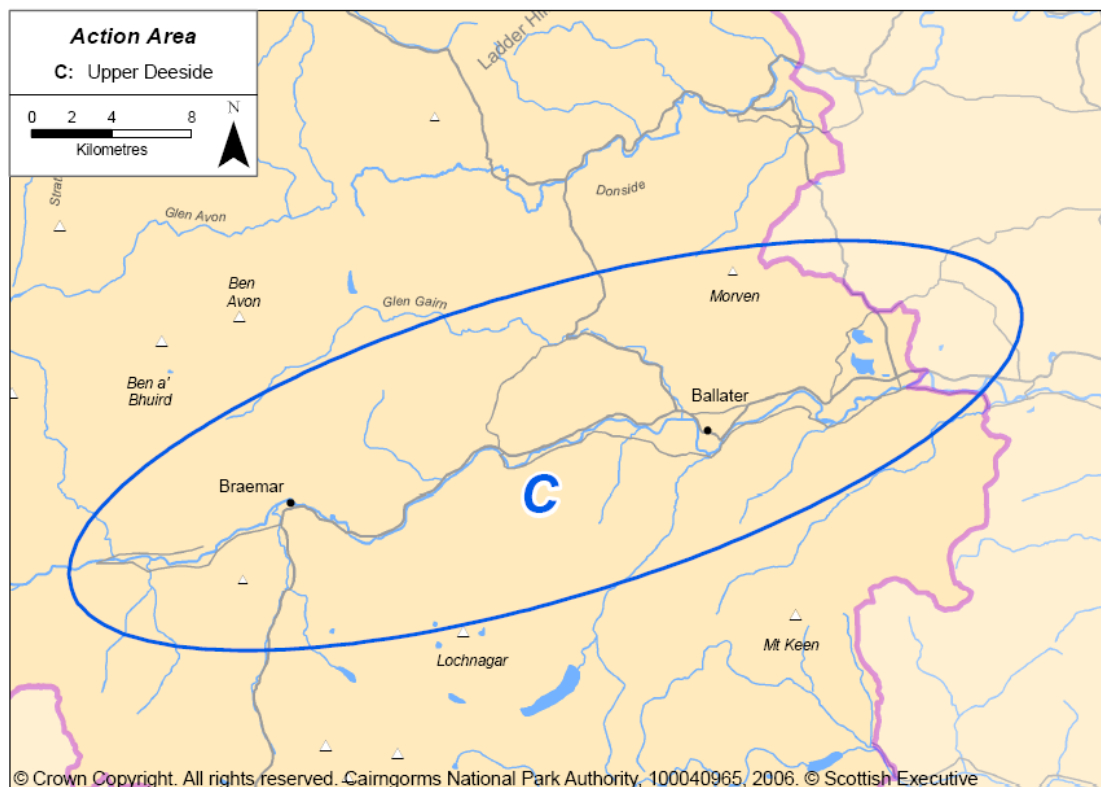
## Action Area C: Upper Deeside

### Description

- 6.15 The Upper Deeside Area covers the upper reaches of the Dee Valley which is the second most populated area in the National Park after Badenoch and Strathspey. There are large tracts of commercial forestry on Deeside as well as native Pine woodlands and birch woods. There are some agricultural fields on the Strath with grouse and deer moorland towards the edges and hills and mountains beyond. Much of the Deeside and Lochnagar NSA covers the area. The Muir of Dinnet NNR at Dinnet and a small section of the Glen Tanar NNR also falls within the Area.

- 6.16 Deeside is a popular tourist destination in part due to its Royal connections at Balmoral. It is also extremely popular with recreational users for both low level access and as a starting point for accessing the Central and Eastern Cairngorms. The settlements on Deeside generally have very good path networks within and around their villages which is largely thanks to the work of the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT), working in conjunction with local land managers. There are numerous paths and tracks providing access throughout the area, some of which link into Action Areas A and B. There are two permanent orienteering courses in the area.

**Figure 6.4 - Action Area C, Upper Deeside**



### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.17 Path networks within and around the settlements are generally well developed but there is a lack of promoted and way-marked off-road links between settlements. Many of these links already exist but are not promoted or managed as such, the exception being the old railway line between Dinnet and Ballater which is promoted for walking, cycling and as a bridleway.
- 6.18 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.
- 6.19 There is currently one horse riding business based in Upper Deeside but there is little promotion of the area for horse-riding tourism and a lack of information about rights and responsibilities and suitable routes.

- 6.20 There are a number of cycle hire businesses based in Upper Deeside but as with horse-riding, there is little promotion of the area for cycling and a lack of information about rights and responsibilities and suitable routes.
- 6.21 In some areas in Upper Deeside, the provision of promoted routes or information about suitable routes for people of all abilities is very limited, for example around Braemar.
- 6.22 The River Dee and its tributaries are popular for kayakers and canoeists but infrastructure and information about access and egress points is limited. There is also ambiguity over water-borne access to Loch Kinord.
- 6.23 There are a number of permanent orienteering courses in the area. There is a lack of provision for trail-O (all-abilities) and mountain bike orienteering. There is need to find a range of appropriate sites and agree protocols that allow events to proceed where mitigation measures permit, respecting the environmental sensitivity.

## **Priorities**

Priorities in this area are:

- Building on the excellent work done by Upper Deeside Access Trust and land managers to maintain existing path networks;
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities through Core Paths Planning process;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to school and work places;
- Completion and effective management (including marketing) of a multi-user long distance route from Aberdeen to Ballater;
- Development of further opportunities for horse riding and cycling;
- Development of further opportunities for less able people, especially around Braemar.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users e.g. people with pushchairs
- Provision of information and infrastructure (where appropriate) for water users on the Dee and other water bodies.

## Action Area D: Upper Donside

Figure 6.5 - Action Area D, Upper Donside



### Description

- 6.24 Area D covers the area known as Strathdon on the upper reaches of Donside where the A944 road runs down the Strath adjacent to the River Don. There are settlements scattered throughout Strathdon adjacent to the main road and up Glen Buchat including Corgarff, Roughpark and Bellabeg. The Ladder Hills lie to the north of the Strath and Morven and surrounding hills to the south. A large proportion of the Strath is forested with large tracts owned by the Forestry Commission. Much of the area is managed as grouse moorland and some for agriculture.
- 6.25 There is a permanent orienteering course in the area and promoted walking trails at Ben Newe. There has been recent work carried out to develop trails around Bellabeg. The Lecht ski centre lies to the north west of the area.

### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.26 Path networks within, around and between settlements in the area are generally limited with only a few exceptions. The A944 is the main link between communities but it has poor sight lines and is subject to fast moving traffic. There is no safe off-road route to provide people with access between communities – in particular there are no safe routes to school.

- 6.27 Bellabeg is the first main settlement reached by people entering the National Park on the A944 and is used by people driving to the Lecht ski centre and from east to west through the National Park. At present there are limited access opportunities in the area which may encourage people to stop or to set out for Upper Donside in the first place.
- 6.28 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

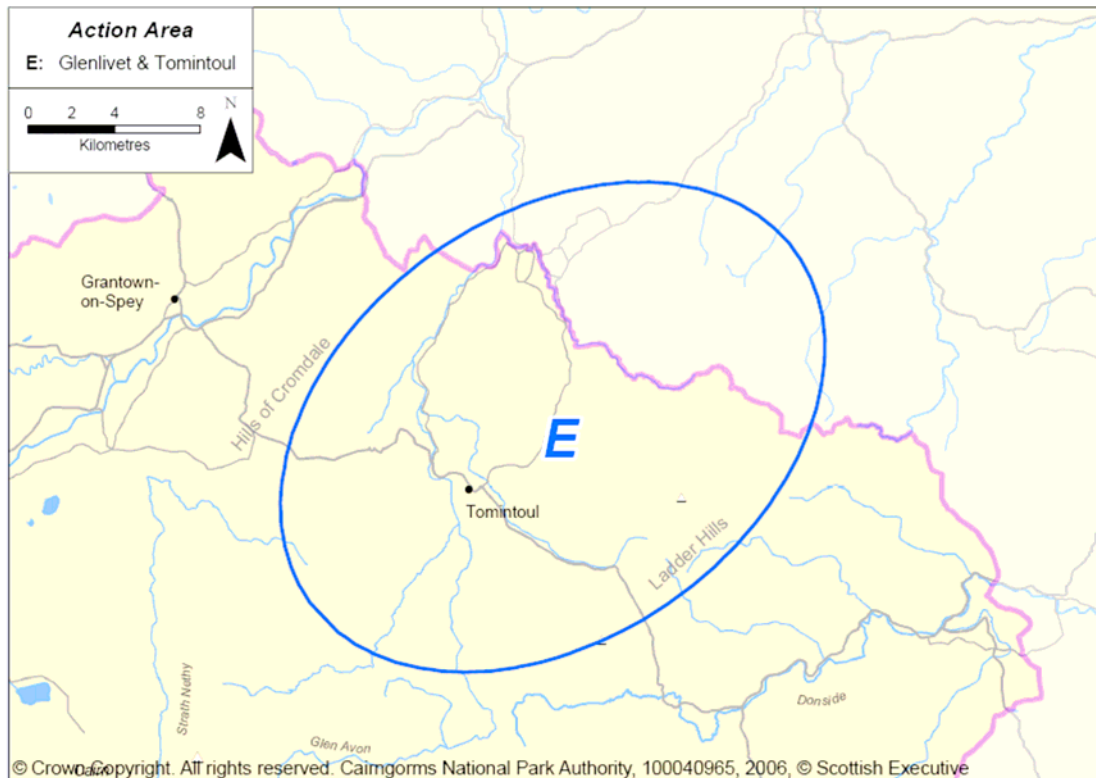
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities through Core Paths Planning process;
- Maintaining existing path networks;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to school and work places, especially near Bellabeg and for leisure;
- Development of further opportunities for less-able people, especially around settlements and close to features of interest.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users (e.g. people with pushchairs)

## Action Area E: Glenlivet and Tomintoul

### Description

- 6.29 Glenlivet and Tomintoul are bounded by the Cromdale Hills to the north-west and the Ladder Hills to the south-east. The rivers Avon and Livet run through the area with predominantly open moorland and some agricultural fields and forestry in between. Tomintoul is the main settlement in the area with small scattered settlements up and down Glenlivet, including Tomnavoulin and Knockandhu.
- 6.30 The Crown Estate own and manage most of Area E and have undertaken a large amount of work to provide one of the best path networks in the Cairngorms National Park. There are 11 routes promoted for walking, 6 for cycling and one for all-abilities access. A spur of the Speyside Way runs through Glenlivet and terminates at Tomintoul. The area also offers a large number of quiet roads for recreational cycling. The Lecht ski centre lies to the south east of the area.

**Figure 6.6 - Action Area E, Glenlivet & Tomintoul**



### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.31 The Spur of the Speyside Way has never been formally adopted although this has been of little apparent consequence to the operation and promotion of the route. The spur currently terminates in Tomintoul.
- 6.32 The network of paths and the provision for recreation opportunities in the area is generally excellent, yet it is not well known outwith the immediate area. There is only one small section of route between the end of the village and the start of the promoted paths that would benefit from path creation.
- 6.33 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.



## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

- Building on the excellent work done by Crown Estate to maintain existing path networks;
- Marketing the excellent network of existing paths and recreational opportunities;
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities through the Core Paths Planning process;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to schools, work places and for leisure;
- Consideration of benefits of adoption of the Tomintoul Spur as part of the official Speyside Way Long Distance Route; and
- Development of further opportunities for less-able people, especially around settlements and features of interest.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users e.g. people with pushchairs

## Action Area F: Lower Badenoch & Strathspey

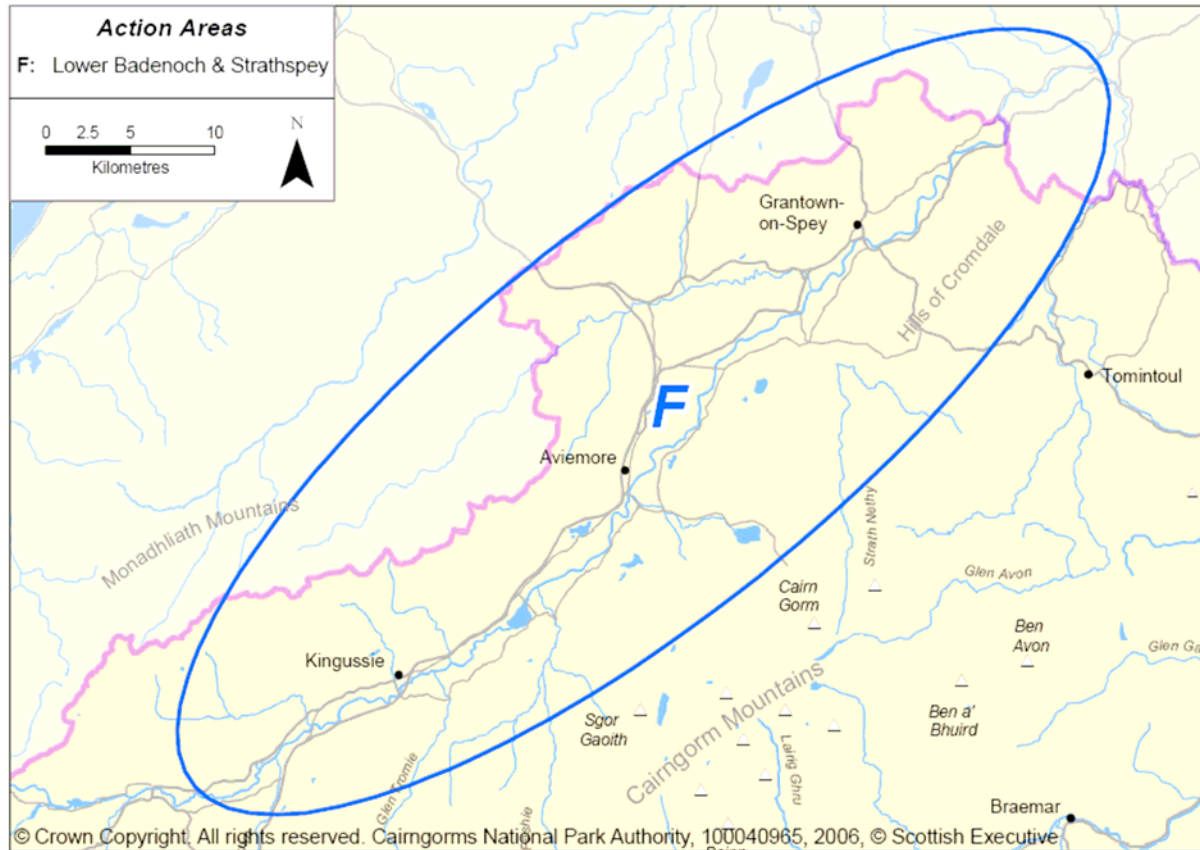
### Description

- 6.34 Area F is the most highly populated area in the Cairngorms National Park. The Strath is bounded by the Monadhliath Mountains to the north-west and the Cairngorm Mountains to the south-east; the River Spey runs along the valley floor. The A9 is the main road in the area providing links to Inverness and Perth. The rail network mirrors the road route with halts at 4 settlements within this area. The main settlements run along the edge of the River Spey and include Grantown-on-Spey, Aviemore, Kingussie, Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten, Cromdale and Dulnain Bridge. Abernethy Forest NNR, Craigellachie NNR, Insh Marshes NNR all fall within the area with part of the Cairngorms NNR and National Scenic Area (NSA) also covering the area.
- 6.35 Much of the Strath is covered in native woodlands of pine and birch providing a wide range of recreational opportunities in very attractive settings. The Spey has numerous tributaries in the area which, along with the river itself, provide excellent kayaking and canoeing opportunities. Loch Morlich and Loch Insh are both popular watersports venues. Badenoch and Strathspey is a very popular destination for recreational users because of the wide range of opportunities available. The majority of the settlements have good path networks and the existence of the Speyside Way, Dava Way, Badenoch Way and National Cycle Route 7 means that the settlements are generally well connected with good off-road routes. The Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and



Glenmore corridor also lies within the area but as it has so many access issues concentrated in such a small area it will be dealt with as a separate Action Area (H).

**Figure 6.7 - Action Area F, Lower Badenoch & Strathspey**



### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.36 There is an inconsistency across communities in the provision of path networks. Some communities have well developed and promoted networks within and between them whilst others (e.g. Cromdale and Dulnain Bridge/Skye of Curr) have none. Some communities have a number of paths in and around their settlements but there is a lack of co-ordinated information on the networks as a whole and a lack of a linking route between Dulnain Bridge and Granttown on Spey.
- 6.37 The lack of toilets adjacent to Kincaig, lack of maintenance on the Badenoch Way and the perceived dangerous crossing of the Spey at Kincaig have all been highlighted as concerns.
- 6.38 There are a number of horse riding and pony trekking businesses in the area but there is little promotion of the area for horse-riding tourism and a lack of information about rights and responsibilities and suitable routes.
- 6.39 There are a large number of cycle hire businesses in the area but the information provided is largely uncoordinated and there is a lack of information about rights and responsibilities.

- 6.40 The River Spey and its tributaries are popular for kayakers and canoeists but infrastructure and information about access and egress points and rights and responsibilities is uncoordinated and limited, although CanoeScotland has gone some way to rectifying this through information on their website. There are some concerns that increased use of the river for watersports will have a detrimental impact on fishing interests. There are also issues with the use of some access and egress points.
- 6.41 The area is extremely important for orienteering but recently opportunities in the area have been limited due to concerns about protected bird species. There is need to find a range of appropriate sites and agree protocols that allow events to proceed where mitigation measures permit, respecting the environmental sensitivity.
- 6.42 The Speyside Way currently runs from Buckie to Aviemore with only elements of it currently accessible to cyclists and horse riders. The long standing plan to extend the Speyside Way to Newtonmore has moved forward some way in recent months. A route has been identified but considerable work requires to be undertaken to put the route in place.
- 6.43 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

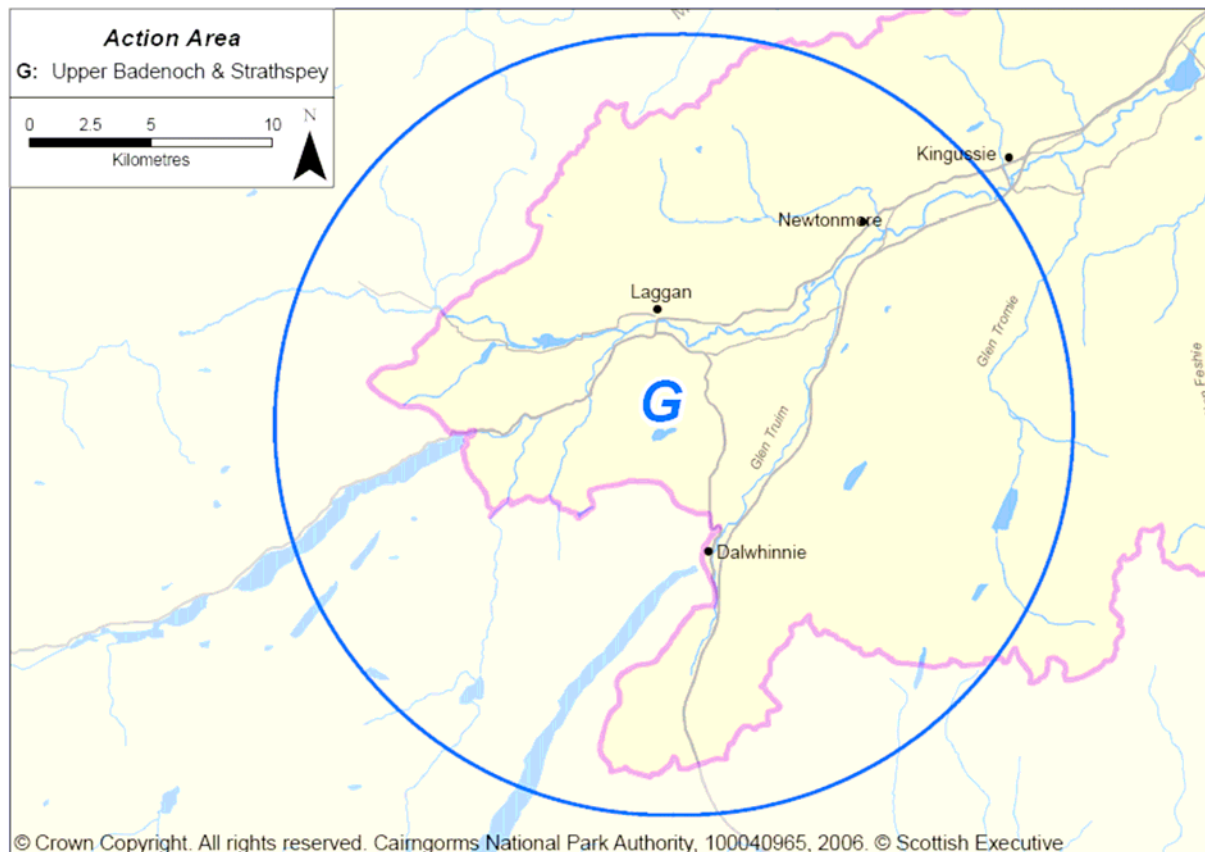
- Building on the excellent work done by some community-based Trusts and land managers to maintain existing path networks;
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities through Core Paths Planning process, especially the communities of Dulnain Bridge and Skye of Curr and Cromdale;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to school and work places;
- Continuing to develop better off-road opportunities for cyclists and horse riders;
- Completion and effective management of the Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore;
- Continuing to develop the Speyside Way to make it more suitable for multi-use;
- Development of further opportunities for less-able people;
- Work to develop opportunities for orienteering events in line with environmental sensitivities;
- Provision of information and infrastructure (where appropriate) for water users on the Spey and other water bodies.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users e.g. people with pushchairs

## Action Area G: Upper Badenoch & Strathspey

### Description

- 6.44 Upper Badenoch & Strathspey is bounded by the Monadhliath Mountains to the north and the Cairngorm Mountains to the east and is characterised by the River Spey which flows from west to east and the River Truim flowing from south to north. The A9 and A86 run through the area adjacent to the rivers. The main settlements are Newtonmore, Laggan and Dalwhinnie. The area is less forested than Lower Badenoch and Strathspey and opens out into open moorland and the Drumochter Hills to the south. Kinloch Laggan, Loch Ericht and the Creag Meagaidh NNR lie to the west of Area G just outwith the National Park boundary.
- 6.45 Newtonmore has a good network of paths, largely thanks to the work of the Newtonmore Community Woodland and Development Trust done in conjunction with local land owners. There are promoted paths in the Laggan area but these are dispersed away from the settlement and there are limited promoted opportunities within the settlements of Dalwhinnie and Laggan themselves. The Forestry Commission Wolfrax centre near Laggan provides mountain and downhill biking opportunities as well as promoted trails for pony trekking and walking. The National Cycle Network passes through Dalwhinnie and Newtonmore.

**Figure 6.8 - Action Area G, Upper Badenoch & Strathspey**



## Key outdoor access issues

- 6.46 There are limited path networks within the communities of Laggan and Dalwhinnie although good opportunities exist nearby. Dalwhinnie has a good link to other communities via National Cycle Route 7 but there is no promoted and managed route which links Laggan to other communities.
- 6.47 People living in the area are highly dependent on private car use due to limited public transport provision and the distances required to travel between communities and to services.
- 6.48 There is good provision of pony trekking routes in the area but there is little promotion of the area for horse-riding tourism and a lack of information about rights and responsibilities and other suitable routes.
- 6.49 There continues to be a high demand for mountain biking including that offered through a managed facility similar to Wolftrax at Laggan.
- 6.50 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

- Building on the excellent work done by some community-based Trusts and land managers to maintain existing path networks;
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities through Core Paths Planning process;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to schools, work places and for leisure;
- Encouraging the promotion of the area for safe off-road horse riding and pony trekking;
- Development of further opportunities for less-able people; and
- Completion and effective management of the Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users (e.g. people with pushchairs)

## Area H: Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore

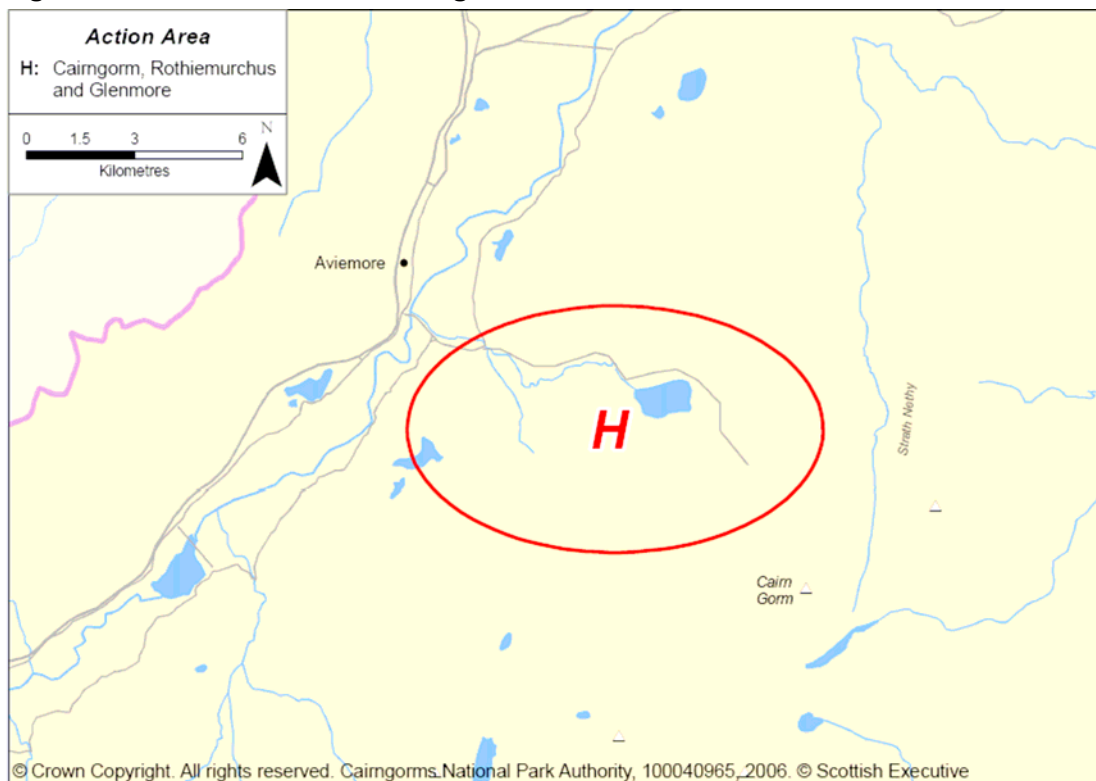
### Description

- 6.51 Area H covers the Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore corridor, an area which is subject to the highest levels of pressure for outdoor access in the National Park. There are an estimated 500,000 visitors annually to the

Glenmore and Rothiemurchus area. The area is predominantly covered in native pinewoods and forms the Glenmore Forest Park. The combination of lochs, pinewoods and the mountain backdrop combine to create an exceptionally attractive and popular setting for recreational activities. The Cairngorm ski centre and Estate lies at the east end of the corridor. The area is estimated to be the setting off point for around half of the people accessing the Central Cairngorms - this estimate rises to 74% in winter months. There are a number of small scattered settlements along the corridor including Inverdrurie, Coylumbridge and Glenmore.

- 6.52 The area provides opportunities for many different recreational users. Loch Morlich is the largest water body in the area and is popular for a wide range of water sports and family beach-based activities. Rothiemurchus Estate and Glenmore Forest Park offer numerous trails for walking and cycling as well as horse riding and ski touring in times of snow. The car park at the Cairngorm ski centre is the main setting off point for climbers wishing to access climbs in the Central Cairngorms. A number of outdoor pursuit centres base their activities in this area. Glenmore Lodge - sportscotland's internationally recognised training facility – is based in Glenmore and attracts large numbers of individuals to the area who become regular repeat visitors.

**Figure 6.9 - Action Area H, Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus & Glenmore**



### Key outdoor access issues

- 6.53 In Area H there are a great many people taking access to the surrounding area from the same place. This puts a great deal of pressure on the natural and cultural heritage. The forest landscape is generally able to absorb large

number of visitors without impinging on the enjoyment of others. Much of the existing infrastructure has been developed in partnership between land owners and Government Agencies with strong community support.

- 6.54 There is a requirement for better off-road walking, cycling and horse riding links to allow people to access recreation opportunities safely and without relying on motorised transport. There remains a desire for a managed mountain biking facility within Glenmore.
- 6.55 The area is extremely important for orienteering but recently opportunities in the area have been limited due to concerns about protected bird species. There is need to find a range of appropriate sites and agree protocols that allow events to proceed, respecting the environmental sensitivity.
- 6.56 Due to the high numbers of people and the wide variation in types of activity, there is potential for interaction and problems between users. However, a survey undertaken in 1998 found little evidence of conflict between recreational user groups<sup>20</sup>. Better promotion of other recreational opportunities in other parts of Strathspey and Badenoch may also help to take some of the pressure off this area.
- 6.57 There are barriers to accessing certain routes with push chairs which preclude regular users from using paths which are otherwise suitable for use.

## Priorities

Priorities in this area are:

- Building on the excellent work done by some land managers to promote and maintain existing path networks;
- Identifying the need for and developing better path networks around communities and links between communities and key recreational destinations through Core Paths Planning process;
- Providing safe walking and cycling routes to schools, work places and for leisure;
- Developing further opportunities for less-able people;
- Promotion of responsible behaviour to a wide range of audiences through Glenmore Lodge, existing visitor centres and the 3 ranger services in the area;
- Improving cycle carrying capacity of buses;
- Improving uptake of public transport for recreational use; and
- Completion of Glenmore off-road route.
- Working to remove barriers to access to allow a broader range of users e.g. people with pushchairs

<sup>20</sup> Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Recreation Survey 2000, Mather, A.S.

## 7 PARK-WIDE ACTION PLAN

### Introduction

- 7.1 This Section sets out the specific actions that are to be undertaken over the next five years to reach the five year outcomes as defined in Section 3:
- a) A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.
  - b) Land managers and those enjoying the outdoors will have a better understanding of their respective rights and responsibilities which will positively influence behaviour and enable all to enjoy the special qualities of the National Park.
  - c) There will be a more extensive, high quality, well maintained and clearly promoted path network so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors and move around the Park in a way that minimises reliance on motor vehicles.
  - d) There will be greater involvement of communities, land managers and visitors in the management and maintenance of the paths.
  - e) There will be more effective connections between public transport and places with outdoor access opportunities.
  - f) There will be locally based healthy walking groups throughout the National Park and active promotion of outdoor activity by health professionals in order to contribute positively to the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors.
- 7.2 Figure 7.1 below clearly identifies each action along with who has responsibility, when the action should take place and the monitoring requirements to ensure the objective will be met in an appropriate timescale.
- 7.3 It should be noted that this Section focuses on actions across the National Park. Inevitably a number of the actions relate to specific geographical areas within the Park and these actions are also reflected in the priority measures that relate to each of the Areas covered in Section 6.

<b>*Glossary of acronyms to support Figure 7.1</b>			
ACCC	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils	LEC	Local Enterprise Companies
CNPA	Cairngorms National Park Authority	LOAF	Local Outdoor Access Forum
CTC	Cycle Touring Club	NESTRANS	North East Scotland Transport Partnership
DMO	Destination Management Organisation	NHS	National Health Service
FCS	Forestry Commission Scotland	SS	Sportscotland
HITRANS	Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership	SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
LA	Local Authorities	VS	VisitScotland

**Figure 7.1 – Park-wide Action Plan**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By who?*</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Improving path condition and quality</b>	
1a	Submit the draft Core Paths Plan to Ministers by February 2008 and implement the actions arising from it.	CNPA, land managers, recreational users
1b	Complete Park-wide survey of upland paths and popular setting-off points, using both field survey and stakeholder input, to develop targeted repair and maintenance programmes	CNPA, SNH, recreational users, land managers
1c	Review the different approaches and techniques to path repair and maintenance in the uplands to improve performance and agree standards, techniques and styles for the future	SNH, CNPA, land managers, recreational users
1d	Establish a Park-wide Trust or similar mechanism to improve and maintain path condition and quality and provide information about access opportunities	SNH, CNPA, land managers, recreational users
1e	Improve/extend strategic routes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extension of Speyside Way to Newtonmore</li> <li>○ Ensure Speyside Way is more suitable for widest possible variety of users</li> <li>○ Complete Aviemore to Glenmore off-road route</li> <li>○ Complete Deeside Way to Ballater</li> </ul>	CNPA, LAs, SNH, FCS, LECs, recreational users, land managers
1f	Review opportunities for people of all-abilities against the relevant policy in Outdoor Access Strategy and put plans in place to promote existing opportunities and address shortcomings	CNPA, SNH, FCS, VS, land managers, recreational users
1g	Identify and remove physical barriers that unnecessarily restrict opportunities for outdoor access or make appropriate modifications to encourage greater access	CNPA, land managers, recreational users
1h	Improve provision for horse riders through removal of unnecessary barriers and specific marketing initiatives to promote opportunities	CNPA, VS, LECs, land managers, recreational users
1i	Provide more cycling opportunities through provision of off-road facilities, removal of unnecessary barriers and specific marketing initiatives	CNPA, LAs, LECs, land managers, recreational users.



<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By who?*</b>
1j	Improve access to opportunities to water by providing low-key, appropriately sited infrastructure at popular access and egress points	CNPA, SS, land managers, recreational users
1k	Improve availability and use of functional walking and cycling routes, especially near schools and work places	CNPA, LAs, land managers, recreational users
1l	Develop use of electronic maps system (CAMS) for path management throughout the National Park	CNPA
1m	Promote community involvement in path development and maintenance through grant schemes, training and capacity building, sponsorship and other support	CNPA, SNH, LAs, LECs, FCS, communities
1n	Encourage feedback from residents and visitors about path condition and about outdoor access opportunities generally with a view to improving opportunities in future	CNPA, communities, land managers, recreational users, DMOs, ACCC
1o	Collect and collate better information on the economic, social and environmental value of paths (and outdoor access opportunities generally) and the benefits of their active management	LECs, CNPA, DMOs, LAs, CCC, ACCC
<b>2</b>	<b>Promoting responsible outdoor access and management.</b>	
2a	Promote and distribute the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (and the specially targeted versions of it) to ensure all key audiences are aware of its contents.	CNPA, SNH, LOAF members, LAs, VS, DMOs, land managers, communities, ACCC
2b	Develop programmes of promotional activity about responsible behaviour that target specific groups and which will be reviewed on an annual basis.	SNH, CNPA, LAs, land managers, recreational users
2c	Encourage all parties to report problems related to outdoor access to CNPA who will investigate, assist with resolution and regularly feed back.	CNPA, VS, SNH, FCS, land managers, recreational users
2d	Further develop and promote the Local Outdoor Access Forum as a valuable source of advice and expertise for CNPA and others.	CNPA, SNH, SS, FCS, land managers, recreational users, communities
2e	Develop groups to share good practice about management of outdoor access across the National Park (based on the model of the Deeside Access Group).	CNPA, LAs, SNH, FCS, land managers, communities, recreational users

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By who?*</b>
2f	Promote regular exchanges of experience and communication between land managers and recreational users and encourage each group to promote good practice amongst their peers.	CNPA, land managers, recreational users
2g	Provide feedback to SNH about the implementation of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code for future review.	SNH, CNPA, FCS land managers, recreational users, communities
2h	Promote best practice in the use of signs for management of outdoor access.	CNPA, SNH, FCS land managers
2i	Promote the Park-wide policy on organised outdoor access events and develop further specific guidelines for event organisers.	CNPA, VS, SS, FCS, DMOs, land managers,
2j	Discourage camping alongside public roads at un-managed sites and improve provision of managed campsites in the National Park.	Land managers, CNPA, LAs, VS, LECs
2k	Promote the policy on car-park charging in the National Park and encourage its adoption by land managers.	CNPA, SNH, FCS, VS, land managers
2l	Enhance the role of ranger services, tourist information centre staff and other key professional groups who have contact with public in the promotion of responsible behaviour.	CNPA, SNH, VS, SS, FCS, ranger services
<b>3</b>	<b>Promoting visitor information about outdoor access opportunities</b>	
3a	Develop and promote a hierarchy of visitor information about outdoor access opportunities – with general information about opportunities at Park-wide level and more specific information available about opportunities in parts of the National Park.	CNPA, VS, SNH, LAs, DMOs, ranger services
3b	Develop and promote technical guidance for way-marking of paths in line with Park-wide policy.	CNPA, SNH, FCS, SS, VS
3c	Promote Core Paths and other paths with appropriate visitor information and marketing to encourage their use.	CNPA, land managers, VS, SNH, FCS
3d	Promote awareness and encourage use of shorter or easier outdoor access opportunities, especially around communities, within the National Park.	CNPA, VS, LAs, SS, ranger services

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By who?*</b>
3e	Specifically market the outdoor access opportunities that have good links to public transport	VS, CNPA, LAs
<b>4</b>	<b>Promoting sustainable transport for enjoyment of the National Park</b>	
4a	Identify and address public transport gaps in the Park through public subsidy and other means.	CNPA, LAs, DMOs, HITRANS, NESTRANS, operators
4b	Work towards universal cycle carriage in public transport and greater use of environmentally friendly fuel options.	CNPA, Sustrans, Cycling Scotland, DMOs, LAs, HITRANS, NESTRANS, Transport Scotland, CTC and land managers
4c	Provide better provision of public transport to link with popular setting off points for recreational users.	CNPA, DMOs, LAs, land managers, activity providers, accommodation providers
4d	Develop more integrated ticketing between different transport modes and in association with activity/visitor attractions.	CNPA, DMOs, LAs, operators, activity providers, accommodation providers
4e	Provide more safe routes to school	LAs, Sustrans, Cycling Scotland, CNPA
4f	Identify roads with low traffic volume and associated off- road routes and promote them to residents and visitors for both recreational and functional use	CNPA, Cycling Scotland, Sustrans, LAs, VS
4g	Manage car parks, through both charging regimes and provision of information, so to encourage longer stays and to fit with other more sustainable modes of transport	CNPA, land managers, activity providers, LAs, operators
<b>5</b>	<b>Promoting healthy lifestyles</b>	
5a	Provide local Paths to Health type schemes to encourage people in all communities to get active within the National Park, where possible working with local walking groups.	Paths to Health, Ramblers Association, SS, CNPA, ACCC
5b	Highlight the 'green gym' opportunities the Park provides and extend the use of active referrals by GPs and other health professionals.	NHS, CNPA, SS

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By who?*</b>
5c	Review the Physical Activity Directory for Badenoch and Strathspey with a view to coverage of the whole Park.	CNPA, LAs, NHS
5d	Promote messages about the National Park as a destination for healthy activity as part of the overall marketing approach, particularly identifying opportunities for young people, disabled people and people on low incomes.	VS, CNPA
5e	Broaden the range of activities included in physical education strategies in Schools to include outdoor activity, working with Active Schools Co-ordinators and Outdoor Education teams to identify outdoor opportunities in the National Park	LAs, SS, CNPA

## **ANNEX 1 Summary of key issues arising from the Stakeholder Workshop (The Lecht, October 2005)**

1. There is a lack of a co-ordinated approach in dealing with a number of different policies that affect the natural heritage of the Cairngorms National Park e.g. conservation issues and the new access rights and responsibilities.
2. The natural and cultural heritage of the Park need to be better understood by all who recreate in the Park so they can minimise their impact.
3. There is an inconsistency across communities in both provision (e.g. path networks) and information (e.g. boards and leaflets).
4. Upland paths require a Park-wide approach to both management and maintenance.
5. There is a requirement to establish a full range of experiences for disabled access takers including an accurate and consistent approach to the description of facilities.
6. There should be a presumption towards multi-use paths that should be barrier free. Failing that the least restrictive option should be the norm.
7. More off-road and traffic free cycling opportunities are required together with a co-ordinated approach to network development and supporting information.
8. More horse riding opportunities are required together with a co-ordinated approach to network development and supporting information.
9. Water based recreation has a need for sustainable infrastructure at access and egress points.
10. Orienteering opportunities are decreasing because of potential disruption to Capercaillie and there are limited opportunities for other types of orienteering e.g. trail (all abilities) and mountain bike.
11. Management is required to ensure the natural and cultural heritage of the Park is safeguarded at popular setting off points.
12. There is an inconsistent approach to car parking charges and reinvestment across the Park.
13. There is a high level of variation in understanding amongst land managers of their rights and responsibilities arising from the new access legislation.
14. There is a high level of variation in understanding amongst recreationalists of their rights and responsibilities arising from the new access legislation.

15. The public transport network needs to link effectively with recreational opportunities and path networks both for communities and visitors.
16. Large scale events need to be managed so that their impact on the natural and cultural heritage, on land management operations and on the enjoyment of other recreational users is minimised.
17. A consistent delivery mechanism for both capital and maintenance projects requires to be established that makes best use of all available funds.
18. There is a need to manage potential conflicts between different recreational user groups.
19. There is a lack of baseline data on both usage levels and environmental impacts.

## **ANNEX 2 Use of Ordnance Survey Mapping**

The Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy is a key implementation strategy for the Cairngorms National Park Plan. It will provide a framework for the future management and development of outdoor access in the area. The Strategy is illustrated with maps to clearly show the geographic areas with specific issues and priorities for outdoor access in the Park. Maps shown in the Strategy can only be used for the purposes of illustrating the action areas identified in the text of the Strategy. Any other use risks infringing Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Maps produced within this Strategy can only be reproduced with the express permission of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other Copyright holders. This permission must be granted in advance.

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