

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: ENTRY POINT SIGNAGE FOR THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

**Prepared by: DEBBIE STRANG, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OFFICER
MURRAY FERGUSON, HEAD OF VISITOR SERVICES AND RECREATION**

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to report on the progress made during Phase 1 of the Entry Point Signage Project (which is now complete) and to seek endorsement of the next stages which will lead to implementation of the project. Phase 2 will include agreeing the funding package, detailed site surveys, finalising design, manufacture, obtaining necessary approvals and installation of the signs.

Recommendations

The Board is invited to:

- endorse the general principles which have been developed in Phase 1 of the project and which will guide work in the near future through to implementation;
- agree that the signs described in Option 2 are the most desirable design option for entry point markers and that NPA staff should now, as a matter of priority, investigate external funding opportunities with partners; and
- agree that opportunities for provision of visitor information as described in Option 3 should also be investigated with potential funding partners but that, if necessary, this could be delivered over a longer period of time.

Executive Summary

Since February 2004 CNPA staff have been working with the Gateways and Information Group and external consultants on Phase 1 of the Entry Point Signage Project. That scoping work is now complete and the Board are asked to review and agree the general principles which will guide the project through to a point where there are signs on the ground.

The next stage which requires to take place is discussion with partners about the potential for joint funding. It is too early to ask the Board to make a financial commitment to the project because discussions with partners are still to take place. The Board is asked to give a broad steer on the most desirable sign design option and the provision of additional visitor information.

ENTRY POINT SIGNAGE FOR THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

Background

1. As one of its earliest actions the National Park Authority decided to investigate options for the installation of entry point signs for the National Park. Consultants were appointed (Aaron Lawton Associates) in February 2004 to work with CNPA staff and to advise on Phase 1. The Gateways and Information Working Group (GIWG), which includes CNPA Board Members and representatives from Area Tourist Boards, the Forestry Commission and the National Trust for Scotland, provided invaluable advice.
2. With advice from the GIWG it was recognised that the installation of markers at the points of entry to the National Park would be a vital early step in establishing and defining the new National Park in the minds of both visitors and residents.

Early work

3. It quickly became clear that to deliver a satisfactory outcome it would be necessary to consider more than just the design and location of signs. There is an opportunity to create a strong and positive sense of arrival to the Park and a welcome for all Park visitors. It is also considered that the placing of appropriate point of entry markers in a landscape setting will play an important role in establishing the Park's identity and the special qualities of the area in the minds of residents and visitors.
4. At present there is very little visible evidence of the Park on the ground and, due to the enabling role that the Park Authority will play, this visible presence may take some time to emerge. Therefore, this project will have a disproportionate effect and influence on the way in which the Park and the work of CNPA are viewed by visitors and locals, especially in the short to medium term. Successful implementation of the project through to a quality outcome but within an appropriate timescale will help to establish the Authority's credibility and to define the future direction, standards and expectations for design and quality issues.
5. There is also an important relationship between entry points and the provision of visitor information. In association with some of the key entry points there are opportunities to provide information that will orient visitors to the Park and advise them of the facilities and attractions available within the local area and its communities. In this way the entry point markers and associated works can play an important role in influencing the movement of visitors and their impact on the economy of the area.
6. Although it has sometimes seemed tempting to quickly erect National Park signs so that something tangible is in place, it is suggested that this approach is unlikely to be suitable in the medium or long term. The inherent complexity of a major signing project of this kind, and the potential for ill-considered work to produce a poor quality outcome which would reflect badly on the Park, would make this an unsatisfactory strategy.

Entry Point Locations

7. The consultant made site visits to all significant Park entry points as shown on the attached map. These were surveyed and a comprehensive photographic record made of alternative suitable sites for markers on each route. The individual road entry points were classified depending on the level of traffic using them. This information was used in conjunction with the detailed local knowledge of Working Group members to ensure that location specific factors were also taken into account. A list of road entry points and their characteristics is presented at Annex A.
8. Whilst the position of entry points must bear a reasonable relationship to the actual Park boundary, it became clear that there are a number of other factors that would influence the final choice of location.
 - a) *Sense of Arrival*: Even the most impressive entry sign will not succeed in creating a positive sense of arrival to the Park if placed within an inappropriate landscape setting (e.g. within a poorly designed conifer plantation).
 - b) *Road Safety*: Sign visibility and other issues related to road safety will be important factors in choosing the precise location for each entry point marker.
 - c) *Land Ownership*: The use of publicly-owned land for the entry-point markers would help to minimise costs. Special permissions are required from the Scottish Executive for placement of non-standard signs within the controlled area associated with Trunk Roads. If for some reason these are not forthcoming, the entry point markers will need to be located partly or wholly on private land and in these cases negotiation, agreement and a form of contractual agreement will be required.
9. The combination of the above factors suggests that it will not always be possible or desirable for the entry point markers to be located exactly on the Park boundary.

Planning Permissions and Agreements

10. Various permissions, consents and agreements will be required during the course of the project, the most important of which are outlined below:
 - a) *Planning Consent*: It remains unclear the extent to which CNPA possesses the deemed consent rights of a local authority planning department. It may be necessary to obtain advertising consent and/or planning consent from the relevant local authorities for all entry points. Work is progressing to clarify the situation.
 - b) *Roads Department Consent*: For all sign installation or other building works carried out within the public road corridor, the CNPA will be required to obtain road works consent from relevant local authorities or the Scottish Executive.
 - c) *Road Sign Variation Approval*: For all signs located within a Trunk road corridor that do not conform to standard road sign specifications, the CNPA will be

required to obtain approval from the Scottish Executive.

11. The discussions that have taken place to date with the relevant authorities, including the Scottish Executive, have been very positive. This indicates that there are unlikely to be particular difficulties as long as these bodies are kept closely involved during the detailed planning stages.

Awareness and Involvement

12. It is important that all parties with a legitimate interest in the Park entry points are provided with an opportunity to comment on the proposals in advance of their finalisation and implementation. Elected members from each of the four relevant local authorities sit on the Gateways and Information Working Group and have been closely involved throughout the project. In addition, presentations about progress to date have been made to the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils and the Tourism Development Working Group (involving members of tourism industry) and their comments have been noted.
13. Looking to the future there are further opportunities for raising awareness of the proposals and developing involvement:
 - The concept proposals for Park entry points will be published in the Parklife newsletter, delivered to every household in the Park;
 - Staff from local authority planning and roads departments and the Scottish Executive Transport Department have been made aware of the Park entry points project and their initial comments have been noted;
 - In a very small number of cases, individual houses may be located within the Park but may appear to be located outwith the Park as delineated by the entry point markers. In this case, the affected householders will be individually consulted about this situation before any work takes place;
 - As the project progresses there will be opportunities for Board member to report back to and consult with relevant Community Councils.

Sign Design and Content

14. During Phase 1 it emerged that the following issues are particularly relevant:
 - a) *Visual Identity*: The CNPA's organisational logo is not considered to be suitable for outdoor signage. A new visitor-orientated visual identity for the Park is currently being developed for branding purposes, and it would be desirable for elements of this new identity to be featured at the entry points.
 - b) *Sign Content*: Information on roadside signs should generally be kept to an absolute minimum, be well organised and appropriately sized for the speed of passing traffic. Therefore entry signs will be most effective if they contain only the name of the Park, with no peripheral messages such as 'welcome to...' or 'entering...'.

- c) *Language:* There should be provision for inclusion of the Gaelic version of the Park name, to make a positive and prominent statement about the importance of the Gaelic language and culture in the area.
- d) *Size and design:* The sign should be placed to one side of the road or path, as opposed to gateway features straddling or framing the road. The main factor in the size of the roadside sign is the average speed of traffic passing by; the higher the speed, the larger the sign required. This has to be balanced with the scale of landscape within which the sign is to be placed. It is not considered appropriate to have markers indicating that a traveller is exiting from the Park.

Principles for entry point markers

15. In accordance with the findings of Phase 1 of the project, the following general principles have been developed which will guide completion of the Project:
 - a) Entry point markers should be developed, in association with landscaping and other works, to provide a positive experience for people arriving at the Park, encapsulating the area's essential character and as far as possible evoking the Park's fundamental values of quality, welcome, integrity, respect, protection and progress.
 - b) Entry point markers of an appropriate design should be provided at 31 sites as shown on the attached map. Of these, 22 sites are on public roads; two sites are on the Speyside Way Long Distance Route; two sites are on the National Cycle Network route along the A9 corridor and five sites are at mainline railway stations.
 - c) The precise location of the entry point markers should be as close as possible to, but not necessarily on, the Park boundary so as to allow the best possible outcome in terms of sense of arrival to the Park, road safety and negotiations with land-owners.
 - d) High profile sites (as indicated by 'A' in Annex A) would benefit from a significant degree of landscaping and associated works to promote an appropriate sense of identity. Low profile sites (denoted by 'C') require only minimal additional intervention.
 - e) Road and path entry point markers should be read by traffic passing in one direction only and no provision should be made for signs indicating exit from the Park.
 - f) Signs should generally include a visual identity relating to the Park and a minimum number of words but, if they include the name of the National Park, it must be in both English and Gaelic.
 - g) Where possible, entry point markers at key sites should be linked to the provision of visitor information close to, or shortly after passing, the entry point markers.

The purpose of this information is to provide orientation for visitors, encouraging them to stay in and explore the Park.

Recommendation:

16. **The Board is invited to endorse the general principles which have been developed in Phase 1 of the project and which will guide work in the near future through to implementation.**

Options for phasing the delivery of the works

17. As part of Phase 1 a range of options for entry point markers and associated works that could be taken forward were also developed. For each of these options indicative costs (excluding VAT) were drawn up and an estimate made of the time it would take to put them in place once the funding package had been agreed. Three options have been described below to assist the Board in providing a steer that will help staff guide the project forwards. It should be noted that the options described are not mutually exclusive and that hybrid options are also possible. The first two options relate to the signs and the third to an enhanced landscaping package.

Option 1: Metal road signs with minimal landscaping/information provision

18. This approach would use the standard, officially approved road-sign technology to be found on roadside signs throughout the country, requiring no special approvals. The sign is composed of self-adhesive vinyl graphics applied to a coated aluminium sign panel supported on galvanised steel posts. There would be some kind of visual image and text with the name of the Park in English and Gaelic. An illustration of the type of sign envisaged will be shown at the Board meeting.
19. The estimated cost of a single Category 'A' metal and vinyl sign is around £1,200. It is estimated that to deliver this broad approach to the signs at the 31 points specified above, with minimal landscaping would cost approximately £195k and could be delivered in just over 12 months, starting from a point when the funding package is in place.
20. Advantages of this approach include:
- simplicity and well-proven sign construction techniques
 - relatively low cost
 - relatively quick to implement
21. Disadvantages and risks of this approach include:
- the basic sign design combined with the minimal landscaping works that would be undertaken, does not produce a quality sense of arrival at a special place;
 - the signs would only be durable for 5-10 years (depending on the technique used) and therefore maintenance/replacement costs in long term would be significant

22. In conclusion, whilst this approach has some practical benefits in the short term, it fails to a very significant degree in the important purpose of creating a strong and positive sense of arrival.

Option 2: Granite slab sign with minimal landscaping/information provision

23. This approach uses shaped slabs of granite combined with other high quality materials (sourced in Scotland) to build up a bold, simple and prominent arrival sign with distinct sign-panel and sign-base elements. The base is composed of layers of slab-form material with their top edges cut to evoke the shapes of the Cairngorm mountains near to each sign location. The layered, three-dimensional relief is also designed to produce an effect that echoes the Cairngorms mountains' appearance as it changes with the angle of the light and the weather conditions.
24. The sign-panel rising above the base is a plain, rectilinear slab of material containing the main information content. To complement the granite used extensively in the sign's production, options for the use of other high quality materials such as steel and glass could also be investigated. An illustration of the type of sign envisaged will be shown at the Board meeting.
25. For signs at the less prominent Category 'C' entry points (including smaller roads, cycle paths and footpaths) a more compact and economical version of the sign can be produced, with the visual image etched into a simple granite panel.
26. The main features and issues associated with this approach are its unique and distinctive approach to entry point signing. The cost of a single Category 'A' marker is approx £40,000. It is estimated that to deliver this package of signs at the points specified above, with only minimal landscaping, would cost approximately £850k and could be delivered in approximately two years from a point when all funding is in place.
27. The advantages of this approach include:
- unique and distinctive design
 - very strong sense of arriving at a special and high quality place
 - relatively low maintenance over an extended period due to durability of the materials
28. The disadvantages and risks of this approach include:
- relatively higher cost and more time-consuming to implement
 - relatively complex and, if glass or steel is to be used for the sign panel, partly unproven sign construction techniques
 - the more striking appearance may provoke stronger public reactions in favour of, or against, the signs.
29. After consideration of a number of design options (not all of which have been described above) this design was popular with members of the Gateways and Information Working Group. The Group was enthusiastic about the incorporation of slab-form glass into the sign if, after further investigation, it proves technically and

economically viable. It is thought that glass would provide a striking and very high quality appearance and evoke appropriate images of water and ice, in addition to helping to create a contemporary and forward looking identity for the Park.

30. In conclusion, this approach would produce the most distinctive and Park entry point signing, albeit at a higher cost and higher level of risk than some other signing options.

Option 3: Provision of visitor information and associated landscaping

31. This option provides potential to complement the two types of sign described above by adding high quality, landscaped lay-bys and visitor information points at the six category A sites around the Park. The costs of such works are generally very substantial. For example, the provision of even a standard new lay-by on a trunk road, without significant landscaping, costs in the order of £130-200k. The consultant estimates that to provide the required suite of lay-bys and visitor information points would cost, in addition to the costs of the entry point markers described above, approximately £1.4 million. This figure comprises £1100k for construction of lay-bys, £118k for visitor information points, and the remainder for design, engineering and landscape elements.

Assessment and Recommendation

32. It has become clear that to implement a project of this size, complexity and quality will require significant financial resources and considerable attention to project management. Phase 1 of the project has only just been completed and staff are beginning to hold discussions with potential funding partners about delivery of the project.
33. Provision of a robust cost-benefit analysis of the different options presented above would be challenging. This is largely because of the difficulty of quantifying the benefits of the different design options. Never-the-less it is instructive to consider briefly the costs and benefits that are relevant to consideration of the alternative options:
- cost of planning and managing the project
 - cost of installation
 - cost of maintenance over an extended period
 - benefits of establishing the “distinctive character and coherent identity” of the Park (or a “sense of place”) in the minds of local people and visitors
 - benefits of identifying where the Park begins and ends
 - benefits (largely economic and social) accrued as result of additional visits to the Park and visitors spending longer periods of time in the Park
 - benefits (largely social and environmental) accrued as a result of the Park having a distinctive identity which encourages high standards of behaviour in relation to the special qualities of the area.
34. Given that it is not possible at this time to quantify the benefits of the alternative options, a number of different approaches can be taken to get a crude indication of

value for money and affordability.

a) *What approaches have been taken elsewhere?*

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA have been working on a major landscaping project at one prominent roundabout near to the main southern gateway to the Park. Two issues are relevant. First, there is a considerable degree of partnership working, involving Scottish Executive Trunk Roads Department, the local authority and the local enterprise company. Secondly, the budget for this one site is substantial at around £600k.

b) Elsewhere in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP the Authority installed 18 entry point signs as part of their European funded Early Actions Programme. It is thought that between £400-500k was spent on signs (including directional road signs) but it should be noted that most of the entry point markers were seen as temporary and were only ever intended to be adequate for the first few years of the Park.

c) *What support can we expect from partners?*

Early indications are that the Scottish Executive Trunk Roads Network Management Department are enthusiastic about working with the NPA on upgrading of the landscape elements associated with the site at Drumochter (A9) in particular, and may also consider contributing both financially and in terms of project management. To progress this further, the Park Authority would need to undertake some preliminary design work and some landscape design work. Discussions with other funding partners are at a very early stage and it is not appropriate to report on progress.

d) *Can we afford to pursue the more expensive options?*

During the project's planning it has always been expected that the project will be delivered by the NPA working in close association with partner organisations. As described above, early discussions with Scottish Executive have been very positive. However, it is too early to estimate with any degree of accuracy how successful our other approaches to partners will be. If we are not successful in terms of raising funds through partnership working, and we wished to pursue the more expensive options then we would need to look again at our budgets and also look to deliver the works over a longer period of time.

35. It is too early to ask the Board to make a specific allocation of funds for the project but, in order to progress discussions with potential funding partners it would be helpful to get a steer from the Board about their preferred design option, recognising that this will have implications for costs and schedule of delivery. It is likely that potential funders will require preliminary design work, and as mentioned above, in some cases some landscape design work that the Park Authority will need to commission. Staff can then progress discussions and return to the Board at a later date to seek approval for specific proposals. Because of the scale of expenditure, approval of Scottish Executive will also be required.

Recommendation:

36. It is recommended that the Board:

- agree that the signs described in Option 2 are the most desirable design option for entry point markers and that NPA staff should now, as a matter of priority, investigate external funding opportunities with partners; and
- agree that opportunities for provision of visitor information as described in Option 3 should also be investigated with potential funding partners but that, if necessary, this could be delivered over a longer period of time.

37. Finally, staff are aware that Board Members will be questioned by members of the public about the lack of visible progress on the entry point signs. Following the Board meeting a note of Frequently Asked Questions will be circulated with some suggested answers in order to ensure we are giving out a consistent message.

**Debbie Strang
Murray Ferguson
June 2004**

debbiestrang@cairngorms.co.uk
murrayferguson@cairngorms.co.uk

Categorisation of Entry Points

Category A

High Profile Entry Point, where the Park is entered on very busy A roads, having a high volume of visitor traffic or particular strategic importance.

Map Ref.	Route	Location	Authority	Vehicles/Day
01	A9	Drumochter Pass	Scottish Exec.	7,060 (est)
04	A9	Slochd Summit	Scottish Exec.	7,000 (est)
15	A93	Dinnet	Aberdeenshire	4,400 (rec)
08	A95	Advie	Scottish Exec.	1,880 (est)
22	A93	Glen Shee	Aberdeenshire	1,100 (est)
02	A86	Kinloch Laggan	Scottish Exec.	934 (est)

Category B

Medium Profile Entry Point, quieter A roads or busier B roads.

Map Ref.	Route	Location	Authority	Vehicles/Day
06	A939	Grantown-on-Spey	Highland	1,550 (rec)
12	A97	Glenkindie	Aberdeenshire	1,000 (est)
05	B9007	Carr Bridge	Highland	540 (rec)
11	B9008	Tomnavoulin	Moray	539 (rec)
17		Glen Esk	Angus	391 (rec)
19	B955	Glen Clova South	Angus	285 (est)
10	B9136	Glenlivet	Moray	235 (rec)

Category C

Low Profile Entry Point, quieter B roads, unnamed roads, stations or paths.

Map Ref.	Route	Location	Authority	Vehicles/Day
14	B9119	Ordie	Aberdeenshire	500 (est)
16	B976	Bridge o' Ess	Aberdeenshire	500 (est)
13		Rippachie	Aberdeenshire	300 (est)
07	B9102	Advie	Highland	250 (est)
21		Glen Isla	Angus	89 (est)
18		Glen Clova North	Angus	86 (est)
03		Garva Bridge	Highland	75 (est)
20		Glen Prosen	Angus	48 (est)
09		Drumin	Moray	no data
23	A9	Cycle route	Highland	
24	A9	Cycle route	Highland	
25	Speyside Way	Advie	Highland	
26	Speyside Way	Glenlivet	Moray	
27	Rail station	Dalwhinnie	Highland	
28	Rail station	Newtonmore	Highland	
29	Rail station	Kingussie	Highland	
30	Rail station	Aviemore	Highland	
31	Rail station	Carr Bridge	Highland	