

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title:** NATIONAL PARK PLAN

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### **Purpose**

The Park Plan is the key document for the CNPA to deliver its role of integrating the 4 aims of the National Park. The purpose of this paper is to update Board members on progress in undertaking this important work and to seek approval to proceed as outlined.

### **Recommendations**

The Board is invited to note progress to date and approve the timetable, contents and overall approach.

### **Executive Summary**

The Board considered the CNPA's approach to developing the Park Plan at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003. Since then, work has focused on commissioning research for the initial stages of the process; exploring the relationship of the Park Plan to other plans, policies and strategies; how to incorporate the forthcoming Strategic Environmental Assessment Bill; speaking to external stakeholders about the Park Plan; framing the contents for the Plan; and developing a more detailed critical path.

The outcome of this work is a 7-phase approach to the production, implementation and review of the Park's first Plan. This includes extensive external engagement in the process from the start; the use of resources from across the CNPA; and the application of a Sustainability Appraisal as an integrating tool to maximise the benefits of the Park to all 4 aims and minimise any potential negative effects.

We will complete a draft for Board approval by December 2005. This will be followed by a formal consultation in the Spring of 2006 and approval of the final draft for submission to Ministers in the Summer of 2006. Assuming it is then approved timeously by Ministers, formal adoption by the CNPA will be in the Autumn of 2006.

## NATIONAL PARK PLAN

### Background

#### *Legislation*

1. Under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, the CNPA is required at least every five years to prepare and submit to Scottish Ministers a Park Plan setting out its policy for:
  - a) managing the National Park; and
  - b) co-ordinating the exercise of -
    - i. the Authority's functions in relation to the National Park; and
    - ii. the functions of other public bodies and office-holders so far as affecting the National Park
2. This must be done with a view to ensuring that the 4 aims of the Park are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way.
3. The Act also sets out a procedure for consultation on the Plan before it is submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. Once approved, and formally adopted by the National Park Authority, all public bodies and office-holders, including Scottish Ministers and the National Park Authority itself, must have regard to the Plan in exercising their functions.
4. Under the terms of section 16(3) of the 2000 Act, Ministers have recently issued guidance to the two National Park Authorities on the format, shape and topics for inclusion in the Park Plan. This advice is not overly prescriptive, and has been taken into account in progressing our Plan.

#### *Initial Board Consideration*

5. At their meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003, the Board discussed the nature of the Park Plan; how it can add value to the existing policy context; and agreed a broad approach, based on the completing the following building blocks:
  - a) Draw together existing information about the Park into a State of the Park Report
  - b) Agree a vision for the area
  - c) Adopt indicators to assess the “health” of the National Park
  - d) Examine the existing policy context
  - e) Propose a series of policies for the area’s management
  - f) Prepare action plans
6. This approach was informed by guidance issued in September 2002 by the Protected Landscapes Task Force of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of the IUCN – The World Conservation Union for Management Guidelines for Category V Protected Areas.

***National Park Plan Working Group***

7. At the subsequent meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2003, the Board agreed to set up a Working Group “to steer the process agreed at the CNPA meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September, and to report periodically to the board on progress”.
8. At the Board meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2004, the Board agreed that the short-term outputs of this Working Group should be:
  - a) To scope the shape of the Park Plan and develop a framework for its contents for presentation to the Board by the end of June 2004;
  - b) To initiate the collation of background information to inform the development of the Park Plan by the end of June 2004.
9. The Working Group has now met four times and minutes have been circulated to Board members and posted on the website.

***Advisory Panel on Joined-Up Government***

10. At the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003, the Board also agreed to set up 5 Advisory Panels, one for each of the Park’s 4 aims, and one “to advise the CPNA on the development and then implementation of the Park Plan as a strategic framework for joined up public sector activity in the National Park.”
11. The Advisory Panel on Joined-Up Government met for the first time on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2004, bringing together senior figures from the main public sector organisations active in the Park.
12. The Panel members agreed to work together with the CNPA to produce and then implement the Park Plan; and in the short term to make available information to contribute to the State of the Park Report research, and the CNPA’s investigation of current public spending in the Park.
13. A minute of the meeting has been circulated to Board members and posted on our website.

**Progress to Date**

14. Since the Board’s discussion and agreement of a broad approach on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003, work has focused on commissioning research for the initial stages of the process; exploring the relationship of the Park Plan to other plans; how to incorporate the forthcoming Strategic Environmental Assessment Bill; speaking to external stakeholders about the Park Plan; framing the contents for the Plan; and developing a more detailed critical path.
15. The last of these has involved lengthy internal deliberation on how best to deploy the CNPA’s staff to make best use of our in-house expertise and to ensure that the construction of the Park Plan helps to unify and give strategic purpose to the organisation, as well as to deliver the Park Plan within a realistic timetable.

### ***Research***

16. The contract for the State of the Park Report and Health Indicators research was let to a consortium led by the Rural Development Company in April following a tendering process and the approval of the Scottish Executive as required under the terms of the Financial Memorandum. An interim report is due in September, with the final report in December.
17. Following initial discussion with the newly recruited Heads of Group, it became clear that much of this knowledge envisaged for Policy Context Research was already held within the CNPA and therefore we did not need to bring external expertise in the form of a consultancy. However, we have recognised that we may need some short-term assistance to ensure that we have identified all of the views and ideas expressed during the consultations leading up to the formation of the National Park.
18. Research on Public Funding Streams is about to go out to tender, with a target date for completion by the end of December. This will provide information on the inputs, outputs, and impacts of existing public expenditure within the National Park, and as such will help us to identify where, through the Park Plan, the public sector can be more joined-up and effective in its work.
19. The Working Group has raised the issue of new work to update and broaden the existing Landscape Character Assessment. We are still considering the possible scope of such a study.

### ***Relationship with Other Plans, Policies and Strategies***

20. There is already a wide suite of plans, policies and strategies covering the National Park; and many more in the pipeline, including from the CNPA itself. It has been important to explore how these fit together so that there is a clear hierarchy that is understood by all the stakeholders involved in putting together and then implementing the Park Plan. While the concept of Management Plans for Protected Areas is well established, how they work in the Scottish National Park context is new and untested.
21. It is clear that the Park Plan must be the key tool for delivering the 4 aims of the National Park. Its role is to take an integrated approach, taking the existing policy framework and applying and interpreting it for the special circumstances and broad remit of the Park. The 2000 Act charges the CNPA to lead its construction, and for the Plan to state the CNPA's policy for managing the Park. However, it is also clear that this is a Plan for all the public sector, and as such, it is a Plan for the Park, not just the CNPA.
22. Once the Plan has been approved, the Act states that all public bodies must "have regard to" it in exercising their functions within the Park. If we are to achieve a realistic buy-in from other public sector bodies, and by all sections of the CNPA, then it is vital that they are closely involved in putting together the Plan. This will ensure that all subsequent policies and strategies developed by the public sector within the Park will be in line with the Plan.

23. Until such time as the Plan has been approved by Ministers and adopted by the CNPA, work to manage the Park must continue. This means that both the CNPA and other organisations will need to put in place some new policies and strategies to guide current work. As far as the CNPA is concerned, these are interim and may therefore need to be adjusted in the light of the Park Plan. In most cases though, the work to develop interim policies and strategies will contribute directly to the Park Plan itself, and their development now simply reflects our need as a new organisation to have certain pieces of work in place before the overall Plan is complete.
24. One of the key relationships is with Development Plans. The Scottish Executive made a clear statement of their intention in Scottish Planning Policies 1 “The Planning System” issued in November 2002 (more commonly known as SPP 1) that the Park Plan would in due course replace the existing Structure Plans and provide the strategic context for development plans. They have now clarified that even before the legislation is in place to effect this change, once the Park Plan has been approved by Scottish Ministers and adopted by the CNPA, it will take precedence over existing Structure Plans as a material planning consideration.
25. The relationship with the Local Plan is more straightforward. In essence, the new Local Plan will be a mechanism by which the land use elements of the Park Plan are delivered. The process for its construction is being developed closely with the Park Plan so that they are mutually informed by each others’ progress. This will ensure that the final Local Plan is consistent with the Park Plan.

### ***Strategic Environmental Assessment***

26. Board Paper 3 of 12<sup>th</sup> March 2004 discussed the implications of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and how the Scottish Executive planned to legislate for its introduction into Scotland. The consultation paper issued by the Scottish Executive at that time described SEA as “providing a systematic method of considering the likely effects on the environment of strategies, plans and programmes that set a broad based context for the future of development activity.” In considering SEA, the Board intimated a preference for a broader sustainability appraisal assessment that encompassed economic and social aspects in line with the 4 aims of the Park.
27. In considering how to take account of the forthcoming SEA requirements, we are of the view that they should be incorporated within a wider Sustainability Appraisal approach. This will comply with SEA, but at the same time it will be an integrating tool, ensuring that both the Plan as a whole and the individual actions within it take as holistic an approach as possible.
28. We are still considering how best to undertake this appraisal. It is likely to focus on assessing the different parts of the Plan against a checklist of sustainability criteria, and then seeking to modify the plan to maximise its benefit to all 4 aims and mitigate against any adverse effects.

### ***Engagement with External Stakeholders***

29. As stated elsewhere, the Plan will only be effective if it has shared ownership amongst external stakeholders. We have already made extensive contact with external stakeholders, both through the Advisory Panel and a series of bilateral meetings. To date, these have focused largely on explaining the process but increasingly they will move to seeking their views on key visions and issues.
30. Clear and accessible lines of communication will be vital, and we intend to have an “open door” policy on the preparation of the Plan, in line with our commitment to be open and accessible. Through this, we will seek to explain the purpose of the Park Plan; the process for putting it together; and how partners can contribute at any time in the process. We intend to promote this widely, and actively seek opportunities to engage externally, particularly with stakeholders beyond the public sector.
31. We are acutely aware of so-called “consultation fatigue”, particularly among community groups, and so in engaging with stakeholders we will make use of the outcome of previous consultation and involvement exercises, and seek to engage with stakeholders in a format that suits their requirements and working practices.

### ***Contents***

32. The contents of the Plan must reflect the 4 aims of the Park. However, through discussion primarily with the Working Group, we have sought to rationalise the 4 aims into three broad themes – people in the Park, the natural resources of the Park, and people visiting the Park.
33. Our objective is to have a structure that is simple and easy to understand, whilst at the same time acknowledging that there are clearly many overlaps between the three themes, and that some of the distinctions are artificial.
34. It is important to note that this is an initial assessment, and the range of matters covered in the Plan, and how we present them, may change as we progress. A proposed contents for the Plan is contained at Annex 1.
35. We are aware that in completing the contents of the Plan we need to maintain a strategic approach, one that contains enough detail to be meaningful, but not much that it loses its overall direction. This will be a matter of balance and judgement as the Plan evolves.

### ***Critical Path***

36. Building on the broad outline agreed by the Board last September, we have developed a more detailed approach comprising 7 phases as follows:
  1. Internal Preparation: This is work within the CNPA to agree the contents of the Park Plan; collect baseline factual information; undertake policy context comparison and analysis; and develop visions.

2. External engagement: This is work with external stakeholders to explain the process, and then identify the issues and agree strategic objectives. This will include generating consensus on “health indicators” to measure the impact of the Plan on the Park.
  3. Focus on Action: This is work with deliverers, both internal and external to agree actions to deliver the strategic objectives, and in so doing achieve the visions.
  4. Consultation: This is work to pull together the consultation draft and undertake the formal consultation (minimum of 12 weeks).
  5. Finalisation: This is work to revise the Plan in the light of consultee responses, prepare a final draft, and submit to Ministers.
  6. Adoption: Once approved by Ministers, with or without modification, the Authority must adopt the Plan. Work is then required to disseminate the Plan
  7. Implementation: Once adopted, this is on-going work to monitor implementation and evaluate progress, leading in due course to a formal review of the Plan within 5 years of adoption.
37. Responsibility for leading on particular themes and topics within the Plan will be shared among the Groups within the CNPA. The Strategic Policy and Programme Management Group will take overall responsibility for ensuring that work is produced on time and to a consistent standard; applying the Sustainability Appraisal; reconciling differences; identifying opportunities; organising the formal consultation; and co-ordinating the monitoring, evaluation and review process.

### ***Timetable***

38. To date, Ministers have not specified a timetable for the completion of the first Park Plan; and officials have suggested that in the first instance, it would be helpful if the CNPA could suggest a realistic timetable.
39. Accordingly a detailed timetable for each of the 7 phases is set out in Annex 2. This hinges on the timing of the formal consultation in the Spring 2006. Local communities have consistently stated that if they are to play an active role in a consultation process then it needs to take place either in the Spring or the Autumn. We aim to involve local communities on an on-going basis in the development of both the Park Plan and Local Plan so that the formal consultation will contain few surprises. Nevertheless, we think it important to respect the communities’ views on this important point.
40. We consider that Spring 2006 is a realistic target date for a consultation on the Park Plan, with submission to Ministers for their approval in August 2006.
41. This timetable is 18 months later than suggested at the September 2003 Board and reflects a more realistic assessment of how long it will take to gather together the necessary information, and crucially to develop relationships that will generate a Plan that has shared ownership. There are quicker alternatives, but none of these will produce a Park Plan that will truly bind all of the stakeholders into achieving the 4 aims of the Park in an integrated and co-ordinated way.

### ***Resource Implications***

42. The financial implications of preparing the Park Plan represent only a small part of our annual programme expenditure, and there is adequate provision for this within the Corporate Plan for 2004-07. However, the approach we have adopted of involving staff from across the CNPA to ensure broad ownership and a single overall strategic focus for the organisation is very resource intensive and may limit our capacity to take on significant large projects over the next 12-15 months.

### ***Steering the Project***

43. It is the role of the CNPA's officials, lead by the Strategic Policy and Programme Management Group, to manage the production of the Park Plan on behalf of the Board. To date, the National Park Plan Working Group has helped to steer this process, leading to the delivery of the two short-term outputs agreed by the Board. This approach has worked well as part of the start-up phase of the CNPA, drawing on the expertise of particular Board members, and allowing good progress to be made in advancing our thinking on the Plan whilst key staff within the CNPA were recruited.
44. We are now moving into a different phase. Key staff are in place, and our focus is now on implementing an agreed programme of work to put the Park Plan together. This will be managed by an internal steering group comprising Heads of Groups, reporting progress and seeking approval from the Board for the different elements of the Plan as they are produced.
45. We therefore recommend that the existing Working Group should now be disbanded, and replaced by a more flexible and outward facing approach, one that seeks greater involvement from our stakeholders, and uses individual Board members on an ad hoc advisory basis, drawing on their particular expertise and experience as and when necessary.

### ***Other Considerations***

46. There are a number of other important considerations that have been raised. These include the possibility of formally zoning parts of the Park in line with some international models; whether the Plan should be updated on a rolling rather than episodic basis; and the final format and dissemination of the Plan.
47. These issues, and others which arise as the Plan is developed, will be brought back to the Board for discussion in due course.

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**2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004**  
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## Annex 1

### Proposed Park Plan – Contents

The following are proposed sections for the final Park Plan:

1. Introduction
  - purpose of National Parks
  - purpose of the Park Plan
  - how it was put together
  - resolving conflict
  - Scottish Executive guidance
  - relation to Development Planning Process
  - Strategic Environmental Assessment
  - monitoring and review
2. About the Park
  - a special and popular place
  - a national asset
3. The Wider Context
  - sustainability and sustainable development
  - economic competitiveness
  - social justice
  - social inclusion
  - healthy living
  - tourism
  - landscape
  - climate change
4. Our Vision for the Park
5. Communities Living and Working in the Park
  - employment
  - industry
  - housing and infrastructure
  - education and training
  - business support
  - community support
  - living cultures
  - historic sites
  - building design
  - cultural landscapes
  - transport and communications
  - waste disposal/minimisation
  - renewable energy

6. Conserving and Enhancing the Park

land and water management  
natural minerals  
wild land  
water  
air  
nature conservation

7. Understanding and Enjoying the Park

A Park for All  
access management and infrastructure  
information provision (including interpretation)  
visitor facilities  
environmental education

8. Annexes

report of consultation on the draft Plan  
list of organisations involved in the preparation and formal consultation  
Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating the Strategic Environmental  
Assessment)

## Overview of Park Plan process by quarters

Phases	Apr-June 04	July-Sept 04	Oct-Dec 04	Jan-Mar 05	Apr-June 05	July-Sept 05	Oct-Dec 05	Jan-Mar 06	Apr-June 06	July-Sept 06	Oct-Dec 06
1) Internal Preparation		B		B							
2) External Engagement					B						
3) Focus on Action											
4) Formal Consultation							B				
5) Finalisation										B	
6) Adoption										S	B
7) Implementation											▶

Notes: B = Board Paper  
S = Submission to Ministers

## Board Papers

July 04 Seek approval for detailed way forward.  
Jan 05 Seek approval for overall vision and for theme visions.  
April 05 Present theme issue papers for discussion by the Board.  
Dec 05 Seek approval of consultation draft.  
Aug 06 Seek approval of final draft for submission to Ministers taking into account the responses to consultation.  
Oct 06 Seek formal adoption, assuming Ministerial approval (with or without modifications).