
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: National Park Plan

Prepared by: Hamish Trench National Park Plan Officer

Purpose

To agree the significant changes to be made to the National Park Plan following the public consultation in order to allow its completion and agree further work on implementation.

Recommendations

That the Board

- a) approves the revised vision for the National Park Plan, as at Annex I;
- b) approves the revised structure for the National Park Plan, as at Annex II;
- c) approves the proposed significant changes in response to the public consultation;
- d) agrees to review the Advisory Forums in order to establish the most effective mechanisms to inform delivery of the National Park Plan.

Executive Summary

Following the public consultation on the Draft National Park Plan and subsequent discussion with a range of partners, a number of significant changes to the structure and content of the plan are proposed. The consultation provided a large number of constructive suggestions for improving and developing the draft, which we have been taking forward with partners and redrafting. This paper highlights the more significant changes proposed, including the revised vision and structure of the plan.

Implementation of the plan, due to start in 2007/08, requires practical means to bring together the necessary partnerships, both to deliver the actions in the plan and to advise on its ongoing implementation. As part of a process to take place in early 2007 to establish the necessary implementation groups, a review of the role of existing advisory forums is proposed.

NATIONAL PARK PLAN - FOR DECISION

Background

1. This paper seeks approval for the significant areas of change to the draft National Park Plan in response to the public consultation.
2. Paper 2 of the Board meeting on 8 September 2006 accompanied publication of the interim consultation report, summarising the responses from the public consultation. That paper also highlighted some significant themes emerging from the responses which required further discussion with the Board and partner organisations in order to consider how they might be addressed, and what changes to the plan should be made.
3. Since the 8th September the Board has held three informal discussion sessions to consider these issues, and staff have held discussions with the relevant partner organisations to consider how best to change and develop the plan in response to these issues.
4. This paper draws together these discussions to seek approval for the proposed areas of change, in order that the drafting of the plan may be completed. A large number of more minor changes are also being made to the text to improve and develop the draft.

Discussion

Vision

5. Respondents from several sectors suggested that the vision could give a clearer sense of difference, be more ambitious and recognise more the regional and national context of the Park.
6. A revised vision is attached at Annex I for approval. This is formatted to give a clear sense of change and progress from 2006 to 2030, and to be more aspirational than the draft. The content builds on the draft vision, suggestions by respondents and the views expressed by the board during informal discussions.

Recommendation

7. **The Board is asked to approve the revised vision for the National Park Plan, as attached at Annex I.**

Structure

8. Respondents from several sectors suggested that the plan needs clearer linkages between sections, particularly the strategic objectives and the priorities for action, as well as a clearer sense of how the plan will be used and implemented.
9. The proposed structure and contents for the completed plan are attached in Annex II. The most significant proposed change is to combine the draft documents into a

single document that is the National Park Plan. This will reduce the need for repetition, improve the linkages and be easier to use. Within this document we propose some further reorganisation to improve clarity and make it user-friendly.

The significant changes include:

- a) starting the plan with the vision at section 1 to give a clear direction;
 - b) focusing the introduction on the plan itself, its structure and how it should be used;
 - c) drawing together the context for the plan into one section (section 3), including the special qualities, and new sections on the regional, national and international context and drivers of change;
 - d) Reorganising some sections and sub-headings within the 3 headings for the strategic objectives (section 5) to improve clarity and linkages;
 - e) Including a new section headed 'Implementation' (section 7) which sets out the approach to working towards all of the plan's objectives and priorities for action, and includes new sections on co-ordinating investment, research and recognising the challenges and risks to delivery.
10. Overall we believe this simplified structure will significantly help understanding and make the plan easier to use, as well as respond to a desire amongst many consultees for more information about implementation.

Recommendation

11. **The Board is asked to approve the structure for the National Park Plan, as attached at Annex II.**

Significant Areas of Change

12. There are many detailed comments received during the consultation on particular sections which we have been able to incorporate into the plan to improve on and develop the draft. The board paper of 8 September 2006 also identified some areas where more significant changes were sought by consultees, as a basis for further discussions with the board and partner organisations.
13. The sections below summarise the issues raised and the proposed changes resulting from these discussions:
14. *Issue – a desire to give cultural heritage a higher profile and greater integration with other aspects of the plan.*
15. Proposed Change - give the strategic objectives for cultural heritage more prominence by starting the objectives with a new section on conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage (section 5.1.2). This will give cultural heritage a higher profile alongside natural heritage and allow a more integrated approach to natural and cultural landscapes in particular. Greater cross-referencing to cultural heritage in other sections will also strengthen the integration.

16. *Issue – a desire to give more explicit recognition to the interactions of the National Park with the wider regional economy and the opportunity the Park presents to contribute to wider regional and national development.*
17. Proposed Change – Include more context for the strategic objectives for economy and employment, and sustainable tourism to refer to the national context and the opportunity for the Park to be a regional and national asset. Include explicit reference to national policy context in the priority for action ‘Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable’. Also include more information on population trends and settlement growth to give a context for the housing strategic objectives and sufficient links to the Local Plan.
18. *Issue – a desire for the plan to encourage diversification of the economy beyond the tourism and land management sectors on which it is currently heavily reliant.*
19. Proposed Change – Ensure the strategic objectives for economy and employment do explicitly encourage and support economic diversification and add a new action in the priority for action ‘Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable’ to identify and promote economic opportunities related to the special qualities of the Park.
20. *Issue - a desire to recognise and plan for the development of the regional and national transport network that passes through the Park.*
21. Proposed Change – Revise the strategic objectives for transport to include more context and explicit recognition of the importance of the regional and national routes that run through the Park and add a new objective to encourage improvements to the road and rail network and ensure they are carried out to high environmental standards and benefit the communities of the Park. Retain the existing objectives that seek improvements to the public transport service.
22. *Issue – a desire to give greater prominence to wild land qualities and include actions to conserve and enhance them.*
23. Proposed Change – Retain the focus on the experience of wild land qualities rather than seeking to define wild land on a map. Give a higher profile to wild land qualities in the vision and strategic objectives and include actions to conserve and enhance the wild land qualities in the priority for action ‘Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Landscapes’. These actions will include using landscape character assessment as a basis for identifying areas that have wild land qualities and then seeking to conserve these qualities or where appropriate enhance them through reducing features that detract from them.
24. *Issue – should the priority for action ‘Developing Sustainable Deer Management’ be changed to a broader focus.*
25. Proposed Change – Retain the focus of the priority on sustainable deer management, as one of the key challenges facing the Park that can significantly influence a number of the strategic objectives. Change the title to ‘Supporting Sustainable Deer

Management' to reflect the fact that many partners including deer managers are already engaged in seeking more sustainable management. Include reference to the need to take account of the combined grazing impacts of deer, sheep and other grazers where appropriate, and set out a broader description of sustainability that includes more explicitly the socio-economic objectives as well as natural heritage objectives.

Recommendation

- 26. The Board is asked to approve the proposed significant changes in response to the public consultation.**

Implementation of the National Park Plan

27. The greatest challenge of the National Park Plan lies ahead, in implementation. As the plan nears completion many of our partners are looking for a clear lead in how it will be implemented. The principle of partnership working is well understood and supported, but it is clear that the National Park Authority will need to take a proactive approach to developing the mechanisms and processes that will put this into practice.
28. There remains uncertainty over the resources available to all partners – those in the public sector will be determined largely by the current spending review. There is therefore ongoing work needed amongst partners to deliver and report on the priorities for action. This requires the necessary partners to come together in a delivery group for each priority for action.
29. There also remains a need for an advisory input from all sectors into the ongoing implementation of the plan, and to provide a two-way means of communication between stakeholders. The existing Advisory Forums have made a significant contribution to developing the National Park Plan, and we should now review how these should be structured to provide an efficient mechanism to inform implementation.
30. Beyond the ongoing implementation of the plan, there is a need to engage a range of partners across sectors in looking ahead at the strategic issues affecting the Park, large-scale drivers of change such as national policy or climate change, and anticipating future management issues. We propose to establish a small group to lead this strategic planning.
31. While it is necessary to have some mechanisms to put into practice the principle of partnership working, we must ensure that these groups have a clear role, bring added value and are efficient in drawing on time and resources. Where possible, implementation should build on existing mechanisms. Several partners have an interest in delivery across a number of priorities and areas of the plan so clear and efficient methods of communication and engagement are particularly important. Work to establish the detailed remits and memberships of the groups is scheduled for early 2007, in discussion with partner organisations.

Recommendation

32. **The Board is asked to agree to review the Advisory Forums in order to establish the most effective mechanisms to inform delivery of the National Park Plan.**

Consultation

33. This paper is informed by the public consultation on the draft plan which gave a large number of constructive suggestions for improving the plan. Since the consultation, we have held further discussions with some respondents and partner organisations to clarify the issues raised and identify the options to address these. Where possible we have circulated revised text to partners and provided feedback on how we have sought to address these issues. Discussions in the Advisory Forums during and since the consultation period have also informed the proposed changes to the plan.
34. Within the National Park Authority, all of these discussions with partners have informed the three informal discussion sessions held by the Board over the last two months, which have provided a steer on the proposed changes.

Policy Context

35. This paper is a key stage in completing the National Park Plan within the timetable previously agreed by the Board, and delivering one of the key outputs of the 2005-08 Corporate Plan.

Delivering Sustainability

36. Sustainable development is one of the guiding principles of the National Park Plan and many of the changes proposed in completing the plan are aimed in part at reinforcing a commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Delivering A Park for All

37. Social justice is one of the guiding principles of the National Park Plan and the work to complete the plan seeks in part to reinforce the commitment to a Park for All.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

38. The process for agreeing changes and completing the plan seeks to ensure an efficient approach to delivering the plan within the agreed timescale while ensuring the effective engagement and support of other stakeholders.

Implications

Financial Implications

39. There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

Presentational Implications

40. This paper provides an opportunity to update partners again on progress in completing the plan, in particular, those who have an interest in the changes being made. It is a key stage in a transparent process to complete the plan using the responses received during the consultation.

Implications for Stakeholders

41. This paper is particularly significant to the public sector bodies from which we are seeking support for the plan. It records the significant areas of change that are proposed in response to the consultation. We are engaged in ongoing communication with these partners to keep them up to date and ensure broad support for the completed plan.

Next Steps

42. The completed National Park Plan is due to be submitted to the Board for approval on the 1st December 2006, accompanied by a Consultation Report which will summarise how the issues raised in the consultation have been addressed in completing the plan. Following approval, a meeting of the Advisory Panel on Joined-up-Government is scheduled for the 4th December to secure support from our public sector partners, before the plan is submitted to Ministers for approval.
43. Once submitted to Ministers a copy of the plan will be sent to all our partners and consultees and will be made available on our website (with its status as subject to approval clearly indicated). In addition, a short press announcement will be sent out and Park Life will be distributed in January to all residents and businesses in the Park confirming the plan has been sent to the Scottish Executive for approval. Constituency MSPs and MPs will also be informed that the plan has been finalised and submitted to Ministers.
44. Details of implementation groups including both delivery and advisory functions will be considered in more detail once the plan is approved in 2007.

Hamish Trench

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hamishtrench@ Cairngorms.co.uk