
CAIRNGORMS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

Title: Developing Mountain Biking in Cairngorms National Park

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Purpose To discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by implementing the National Strategic Framework for mountain biking.

Advice Sought

The Forum is invited to provide advice on:-

- the opportunities and challenges provided in using the National Strategic Framework to develop mountain biking in the National Park. And;
- suggestions for key areas of work that could be delivered through the framework.

Background

1. The total number of mountain bike visits to Scotland is estimated at 1.3 million per annum with 55% being to the countryside rather than to purpose built trails.
2. Scottish Enterprise has estimated that mountain biking tourism generates £46.5m per annum increasing to £119m if including visitors who go mountain biking (off road cycling) as part of a longer stay. Significant growth is predicted over the next five years.
3. National recognition of the importance of mountain biking led to the formation of partner group, the Scottish Mountain Bike Development Consortium (SMBDC), and the development of a National Strategic Framework www.scottishmountainbikeframework.org. The three aims of the national strategy are:-
 - Increased participation leading to improved health and well being;
 - Tourism and economic development;
 - Sporting development and success.
4. The importance of cycling in the Cairngorms National Park is recognised in both the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Sustainable Tourism Strategy. Key policies include:-

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 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.

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.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY

Provide and promote specific opportunities for cycling and mountain biking

Cycling is an increasingly popular activity by tourists, ranging from people on a cycling holiday to those seeking a day or half day's ride. Where possible, off-road routes are preferred. The range of cycling demand can run from quiet family cycling along broad tracks to technical downhill rides suitable only for experts. Provision for this latter group already exists and plans are in the pipeline to open a second facility to cater for this sector. Some off-road routes have been provided in the Cairngorms and this network should be extended, including making links between routes. Cycle routes on suitable roads, also linking into a network, should be identified. Cycling opportunities, including cycle hire, should be actively promoted.

Proposals to for delivering the National Mountain Bike strategy in CNP

5. SMBDC suggest that the national strategy should be delivered through local action plans. These plans should be developed and delivered by local partnerships – 'development clusters'. The first such cluster is currently operating in Tayside and Fife.

6. SMBDC are now working to develop the second cluster in Highlands. The initial suggestion is this cluster should comprise several sub areas including Cairngorms National Park, Lochaber and Glen Coe ('Outdoor Capital'), Inverness and North etc.
7. These proposals are at an early stage but we consider there are considerable advantages in developing a local mountain bike action plan including;-
 - a. An area of outstanding natural heritage that would benefit from a coordinated approach to promotion and development of sustainable cycling.
 - b. Support from single private sector organisation covering the whole area (Cairngorms Business Partnership) with a well developed activity providers group;
 - c. Support from CNPA with existing structures that work across public sector boundaries;
 - d. Single access authority (CNPA);
 - e. Specific 'National Parks' post in Education Scotland developing outdoor learning in the Curriculum for Excellence;
 - f. Existing strategies agreed that will support a Cluster Development Plan (CNP Outdoor Access Strategy, HIE Mt Biking in Speyside [study under dev], CBP Marketing Strategy);
 - g. An area with outstanding potential for adventure cycling - an existing network of off road trails that offer opportunities for multi day routes in a stunning environment;
 - h. An area with growing 'resort' infrastructure: Laggan and ...Lecht in place but with plans to develop new facilities in Tomintoul and at Cairngorm Mountain;
 - i. An area with outstanding opportunities for education that includes the National Outdoor Centre at Glenmore Lodge and many other well established outdoor education centres and outdoor trainers.
 - j. An area where targeted messages about responsible behaviour can be co-ordinated through CNPA;
 - k. Community groups with an interest in developing skills facilities close to communities for local youths and sports development.

The Forum is invited to discuss the opportunities and challenges in using the National Strategic Framework to develop mountain biking in the National Park, and to suggest, in line with current strategy, key areas of work that could be delivered through the process.

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