

Cairngorms National  
Park Partnership Plan  
2017-2022

## **Cairngorms National Park Vision**

Our long-term vision for the Cairngorms National Park is:

**“An outstanding National Park, enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together”**

## **National Park Outcomes**

Our headline long-term outcomes for the National Park are:

### **Conservation**

- A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced

### **Visitor Experience**

- People enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences

### **Rural Development**

- A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities

## National Park Partnership Plan

The National Park Partnership Plan is the management plan for the Cairngorms National Park that is approved by Scottish Ministers<sup>1</sup>. It sets out how all those with a responsibility for the Park will co-ordinate their work to tackle the most important issues.

In particular, the National Park Partnership Plan:

- sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the Park;
- guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the Park;
- provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan;
- sets out the regional land use framework for the Park;
- provides the strategic context for managing the Park as a sustainable tourism destination<sup>2</sup>;
- shows how the Park will contribute to the Scottish Government's core purpose and national outcomes.

The National Park Partnership Plan has been finalised following a period of extensive public consultation, where views were sought on nine key issues – the Big 9. These have evolved into nine priorities in the final Partnership Plan. An 'Agenda for Action' is identified for each of the nine priorities, and a series of clearly defined policies provide a framework for delivering the priorities and actions.

## Scottish National Parks

Scotland's National Parks share four aims set out by the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote 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;
- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

These aims are to be pursued collectively. However, if there is conflict between the first aim and any of the others then greater weight must be given to the first aim (section 9.6 of the Act). This is a sustainable development approach in which conservation of the natural and cultural heritage underpins the economic, social and recreation value of the National Park.

The Partnership Plan embeds this principle in the strategy for the Park and sets the framework for all public bodies delivering relevant functions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Partnership Plan is the National Park Plan required under section 11 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The Partnership Plan provides the strategic context for the Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan and forms the basis for the Park's chartered status under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

National Park Authorities lead the partnerships to ensure National Parks contribute to the Scottish Government's Purpose:

*To focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.*

## **Scotland's National Parks help deliver national priorities**

National Parks bring the focus and the partnerships that can:

- deliver on a large connected scale;
- test and develop innovative approaches;
- engage people through some of Scotland's most loved landscapes.

### ***Climate Change***

Scotland's National Parks deliver climate change mitigation through extensive woodland expansion and peatland restoration. By taking an integrated approach to land use planning, National Parks can also help deliver significant adaptation and resilience for communities within the Parks and in surrounding lower river catchments.

### ***Reversing the loss of biodiversity***

Covering around 9% of Scotland, including some of the most important areas for rare and threatened species, Scotland's National Parks deliver landscape scale conservation. Large scale ecosystem restoration together with priority species action in National Parks is a significant contribution to meeting Scotland's 2020 Biodiversity Challenge.

### ***Natural Capital***

Scotland's National Parks exemplify the connections between nature and our economy. With over six million visitors each year our National Parks are national assets that protect and enhance the natural capital underpinning tourism and land based businesses. Covering the upper catchments of some of Scotland's major rivers, National Parks are key places to connect the value of land management with wider community and economic benefits.

### ***Active Scotland***

Scotland's National Parks provide outstanding outdoor access infrastructure together with the brand identity, promotion and partnerships to increase participation in outdoor activity amongst residents and visitors. National Parks are part of Scotland's 'Natural Health Service', contributing to physical and mental health benefits.

### ***Community Empowerment***

Communities in the National Parks are taking the lead in local development and regeneration. Backed by the co-ordinated support of the National Park partnerships, active communities are taking action to deliver investment, services and enhanced facilities.

## ***Sustainable economic growth***

National Parks are internationally renowned tourism destinations helping drive economic growth in rural Scotland. Investment in enhancing the quality of public infrastructure and the high quality of the environment makes the National Parks attractive places to invest and do business.

## **Role of the National Park Authority**

The purpose of a National Park Authority is to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way. This means leading the vision for the National Park and the partnerships necessary for delivery.

The National Park Authority leads the development of the Partnership Plan and co-ordinates its delivery and monitoring. It is though, a plan for all of the partners involved in delivery. The corporate and operational plans of public bodies will set out their contribution to the Partnership Plan and it provides a framework for partners across all sectors to co-ordinate effort on the big issues.

## **Ways of working – collaboration and innovation**

Over the first decade of the National Parks we have seen strong collaboration develop across the public, private and voluntary sectors. This is delivering high levels of investment, with partner contributions leveraging in significant external funds. It is also enabling partners to tackle constructively some of the long-term challenges, for example provision of affordable housing and promoting/managing land use change.

The National Park requires a place-based approach to collaboration, bringing different sectors and organisations together to align effort and resources with a geographical focus. Developing this approach further has potential to deliver simpler, more effective and better value public services in the National Park.

## **Hierarchy of National Park strategies and plans**

The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan is the overarching management plan for the Cairngorms National Park. It provides strategic direction for five key strategies and plans which support its delivery and are also developed through close partnership working with different sectors. Further information on the role of these strategies and plans is provided in the Delivery Framework sections for Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development.



The delivery of all these plans is dependent on the work undertaken by businesses, land managers, communities, charities and the public sector in mutual support. All sectors must work together to deliver for the Cairngorms.

### **Community planning in the National Park**

The National Park Partnership Plan focuses on those issues that are central to delivering the aims of the National Park. The Partnership Plan will therefore link with the emerging Local Outcome Improvement Plans in the constituent local authority areas by identifying local priority outcomes for the National Park. This will support the work of Community Planning Partnerships. For example, the collaborative work on economic development, sustainable tourism and Active Cairngorms agendas in the National Park will help to deliver key outcomes for Community Planning Partnerships. At the local level, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) will engage with local Community Partnerships and their Locality Plans to help develop a suite of practical actions that are relevant to the National Park aims.

## **Public interest priorities – contributing to the Land Use Strategy for Scotland**

The objectives of the Land Use Strategy for Scotland are:

- Land-based businesses working with nature to contribute more to Scotland's prosperity;
- Responsible stewardship of Scotland's natural resources delivering more benefits to Scotland's people;
- Urban and rural communities better connected to the land, with more people enjoying the land and positively influencing land use.

The Partnership Plan sets out the land use framework for the Cairngorms National Park. The policies and priorities for Conservation, Visitor Experience and Rural Development together provide a framework for making land use decisions relevant to the Cairngorms that contribute to the three objectives and apply the principles of the Land Use Strategy for Scotland.

The Partnership Plan also provides clarity on the public interest priorities that we seek to deliver through land use in the Cairngorms. By public interest priorities, we mean the way in which the Cairngorms National Park can contribute to priorities set out in national public policy. Partners recognise that delivery needs to continue to be underpinned by a combination of public and private investment and management, supported by appropriate regulation and incentives. Collaboration between public agencies, farm, forest and estate businesses and communities is key to realising the potential benefits and delivering both private and public land use objectives.

The public interest priorities for land use in the National Park are summarised in the following table.

**Table 1: Public interest priorities for land use in the Cairngorms National Park**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Public interest benefit</b>	<b>Further information sources</b>	<b>National policy context</b>
<b>Conservation</b>			
<b>Favourable condition of designated sites</b>	Securing favourable condition through addressing pressures on sites including burning, grazing and disturbance	SNHi website: <a href="http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/snh-information-service/">www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/snh-information-service/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity</li> <li>• Climate Change Plan</li> <li>• Land Use Strategy</li> <li>• Scottish Forestry Strategy</li> <li>• River Basin Management Plan</li> <li>• Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach</li> </ul>
<b>Woodland enhancement and expansion</b>	Expanding woodland cover and improving the condition of existing woodland cover to deliver habitat, landscape, carbon and economic benefits	Figure 5: Preferred areas for targeting woodland creation  Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Strategy	
<b>Peatland restoration</b>	Restoring degraded peatland and securing long-term management to increase carbon and water storage	Figure 8: Areas with an average peat depth in excess of one metre	
<b>Water and flood management</b>	Enhancing wetlands, restoring functioning river systems and slowing the flow to deliver flood management and habitat benefits	Figure 4: Natural flood management priority areas  Catchment Management Plans	
<b>Landscape enhancement</b>	Conserving and enhancing the special qualities that underpin enjoyment of the National Park	SNH Commissioned Report No. 375: The Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park	
<b>Conservation of priority species</b>	Safeguarding species for which the Cairngorms National Park is particularly important	Cairngorms Nature Action Plan	



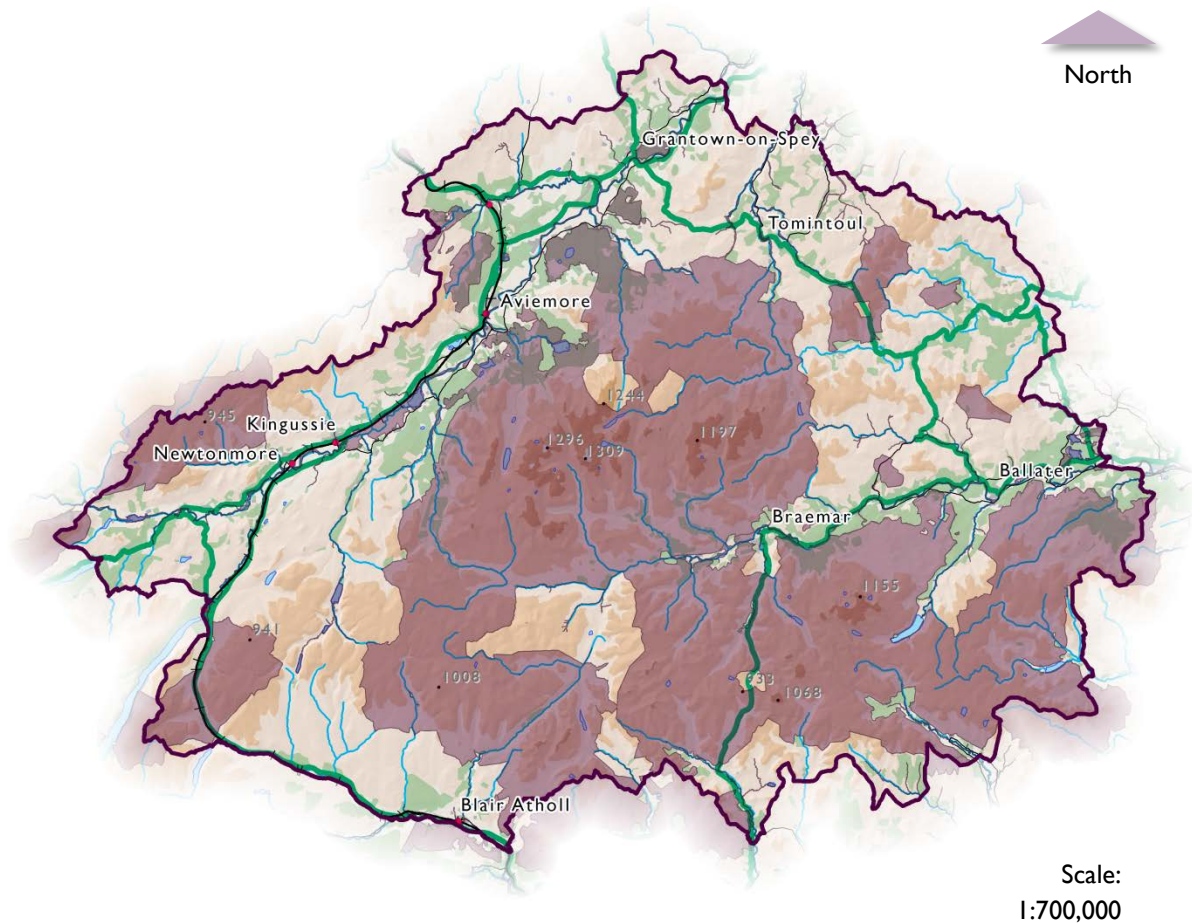
Priority	Public interest benefit	Further information sources	National policy context
<b>Visitor Experience</b>			
<b>High quality outdoor access network</b>	Providing and maintaining an outstanding access network with functional routes for communities and visitors and encouraging active lifestyles	Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan  Active Cairngorms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism Scotland 2020</li> <li>• A More Active Scotland</li> <li>• National Transport Strategy</li> <li>• Let's Get Scotland Walking: The National Walking Strategy</li> <li>• Cycling Action Plan for Scotland</li> </ul>
<b>Visitor information and engagement</b>	Providing ranger services, high quality visitor infrastructure and engagement to help people understand and enjoy the National Park	Figure 9: Visitor infrastructure and information across the National Park	
<b>Visitor economy</b>	Providing a high quality visitor experience that continues to support and benefit local businesses and employment	Cairngorms National Park Tourism Action Plan	
<b>Rural Development</b>			
<b>Business and employment</b>	Creating and maintaining business and employment opportunities to sustain thriving communities	Cairngorms Economic Strategy  Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scotland's Economic Strategy</li> <li>• Tourism Scotland 2020</li> <li>• National Planning Framework</li> <li>• Scottish Planning Policy</li> </ul>
<b>Community empowerment</b>	Providing access to land for community facilities and community-led projects, and supporting opportunities for engagement in land management and planning	Community Action Plans  Cairngorms LEADER Local Development Strategy	
<b>Housing and infrastructure</b>	Providing appropriate land for housing that meets local need and infrastructure that supports the National Park's economy	Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan	



# CONSERVATION

The Cairngorms National Park is one of the best places in the country for nature. This is where we find some of Scotland's wildest land, arctic-like mountain plateaux and Scotland's most extensive semi-natural pine forest, home to 80% of our capercaillie population.

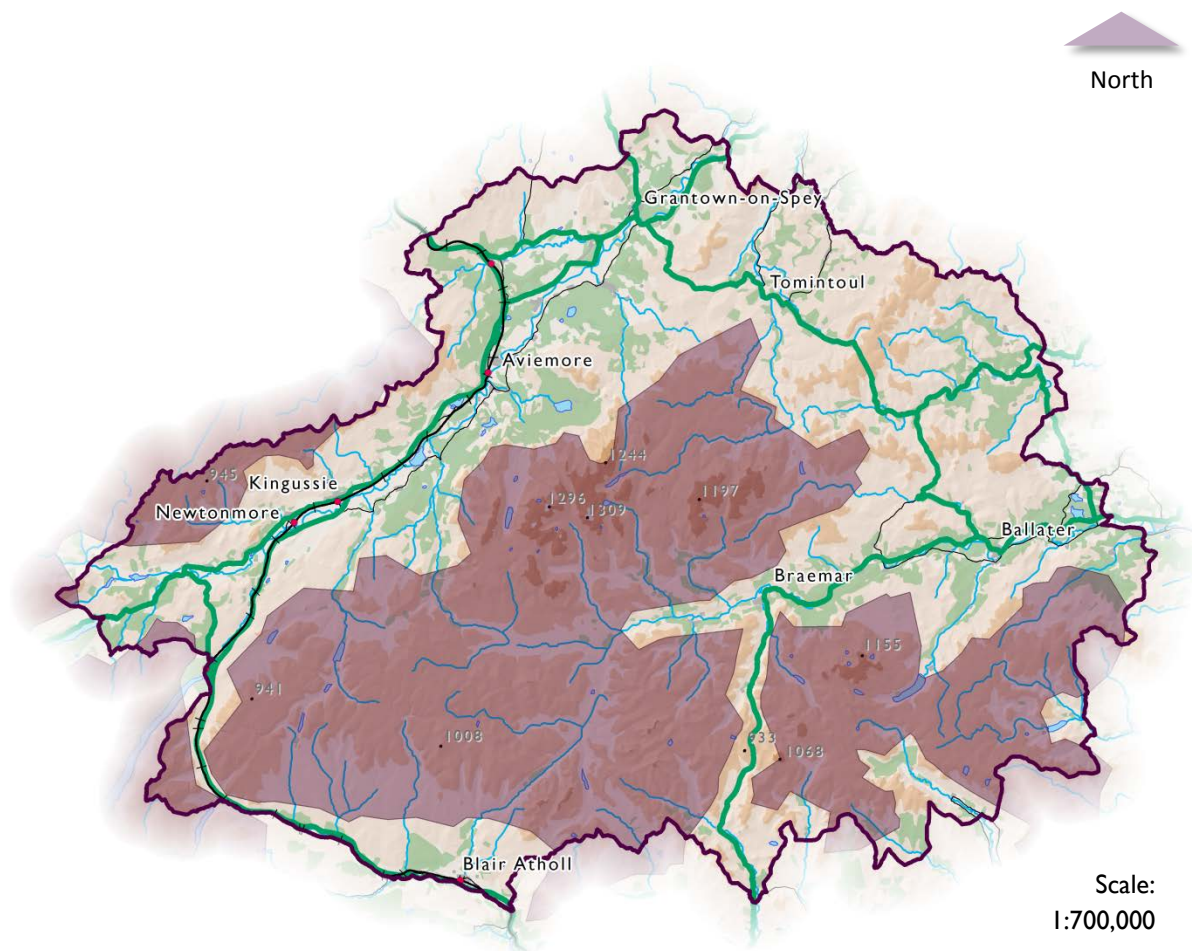
**Figure 1: Natura sites within the Cairngorms National Park**



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Half of the Park is designated as being of European importance for nature through the Natura network and over a quarter of the UK's rare and threatened species are found here.

**Figure 2: Wild Land areas in the Cairngorms National Park**



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The landscapes of the National Park are valued by many and underpin the area's economy. The mix of mountain plateaux, moorlands, woodlands and farmed straths are shaped by nature and working land use, reflecting both our natural and cultural heritage.

Over the last five years we have seen significant conservation gains. Land managers have delivered around 3000 Ha of new native woodland planting and further areas of regeneration through improved grazing management. Catchment partnerships on the rivers Spey, Dee and South Esk have delivered river restoration, riparian woodland and flood risk management and 730 Ha of peatland has been restored. Action has been taken for priority species from capercaillie and Scottish wildcat, to aspen, freshwater pearl mussel and rare plants.

Cairngorms Nature is now well established as a partnership delivering an ambitious agenda for conservation in the Cairngorms. Bringing together the private, NGO and public sectors, Cairngorms Nature provides the focal point for collaboration on a landscape scale.

## Our big conservation challenges for the next five years

### 1. Enhancing habitats on a landscape scale

- Improving the condition of existing woodland and creating a more extensive, connected forest network resilient to changing climate, pest and disease risks, including restoring the largely missing montane woodland habitat;
- Restoring functioning river and wetland systems, improving water quality, freshwater habitats and flood management;
- Restoring degraded peatland and actively managing the carbon and water functions of the uplands;
- Enhancing the special landscape qualities of the National Park.

### 2. Protecting and enhancing species

- Addressing declining and fragile populations of key species including capercaillie, freshwater pearl mussel and other Cairngorms Nature priorities;
- Eliminating the illegal killing of raptors and increasing raptor populations;
- Tackling species management conflicts by combining knowledge from all sectors to develop shared solutions to competing objectives.

### 3. Building support and engagement

- Engaging people in the land use choices and finding new ways to invest in and support the active land management required;
- Increasing community involvement in land management planning;
- Engaging and inspiring people through recreation, volunteering and learning opportunities that connect them with the nature of the Cairngorms.

## These will help deliver the following national strategies

- Scotland's 2020 Biodiversity Challenge
- Climate Change Plan
- Land Use Strategy
- Scottish Forestry Strategy
- River Basin Management Plan
- Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach

## They will also help deliver the following public interest priorities for land use

- Favourable condition of designated sites
- Woodland enhancement and expansion
- Peatland restoration
- Water and flood management
- Landscape enhancement
- Conservation of priority species



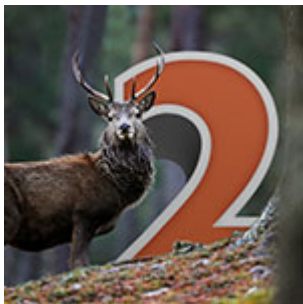
## Conservation priorities for 2017 - 2022

The following pages set out the key conservation priorities which will guide the work of partners over the Plan period. Partners' work under these priorities will help to meet the conservation challenges and deliver the relevant public interest land use priorities.



### **PRIORITY 1**

**Supporting landscape scale collaboration**



### **PRIORITY 2**

**Deer management**



### **PRIORITY 3**

**Moorland management**



## PRIORITY I

### Supporting landscape scale collaboration

Key policies: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4

#### KEY ISSUES

The large extent of the National Park and the exceptional size and quality of its habitats mean we have the opportunity to make a major contribution to national biodiversity targets on a large scale. To achieve this, we must support practical collaboration across land ownership boundaries and bring together the efforts of many organisations.

49% of the National Park is designated as being of European importance for nature conservation through the Natura network. With 81% of features currently in favourable condition there is good progress, but more work is needed to ensure these sites deliver the management required to underpin the outstanding quality of the habitats and species in the Cairngorms National Park. We also need to connect management of the network of Natura sites with the wider delivery of landscape scale habitat enhancement across the Park as a whole.

The focus of action during this Plan period will be to support collaboration that delivers:

- Woodland expansion targets – we aim to contribute 5000 Ha towards national targets in the next five years by improving connectivity between existing forests and encouraging more productive, riparian, montane and farm woodland.
- Peatland restoration targets – we aim to contribute 5000 Ha towards national targets in the next five years.
- River restoration and wetland enhancement – we aim to develop significant projects to restore functioning floodplains and enhanced wetlands that will assist flood management and habitat improvements.
- Designated site targets – we aim to increase the proportion of designated sites in favourable condition from the 2017 baseline of 81.8%.

Significant collaboration has developed over recent years, including the evolution of two geographically focused hubs of collaboration:

**Cairngorms Connect** is a collaboration between land owners and managers including Wildland Limited, RSPB Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland, and Scottish Natural Heritage. It encompasses a contiguous area and extends from the marshes along the

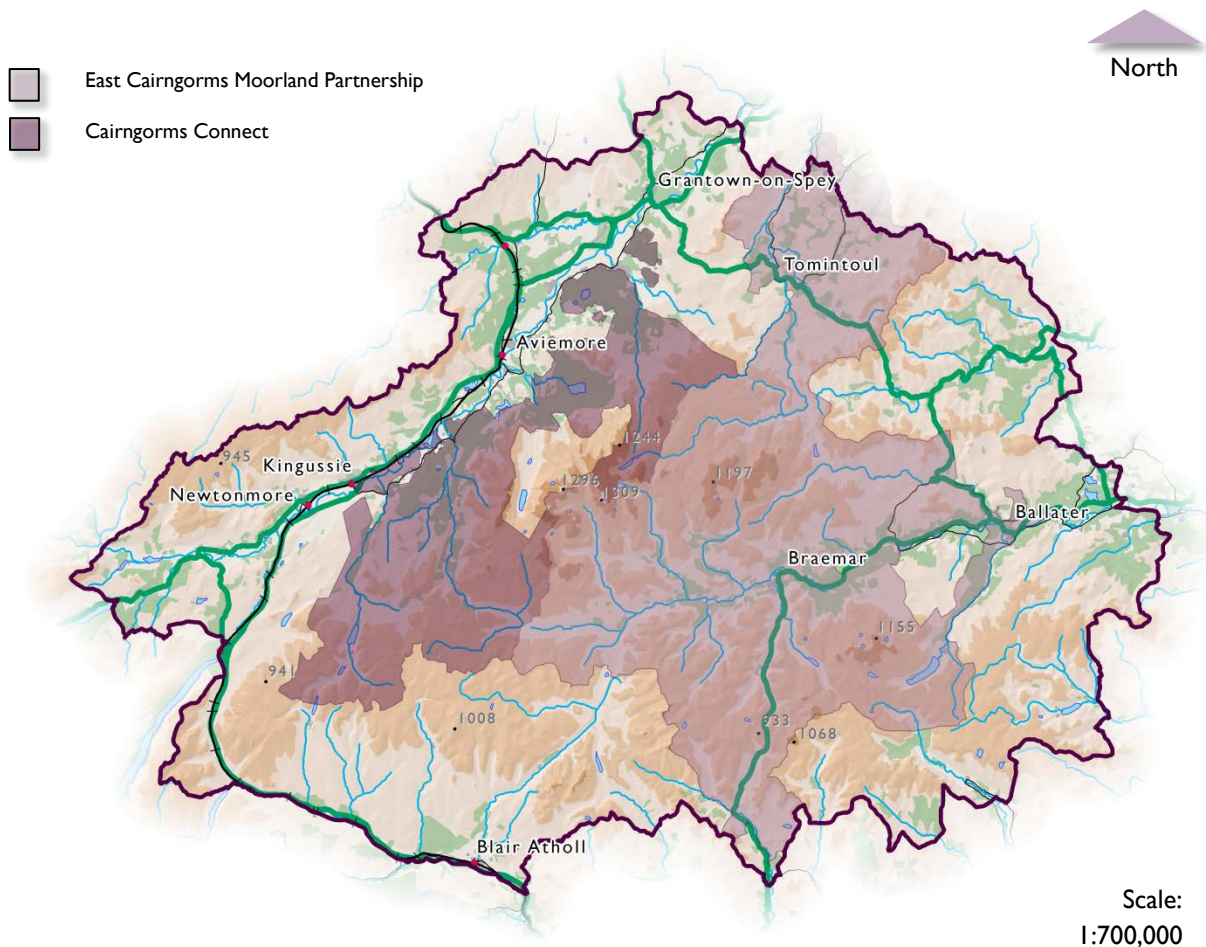
## KEY ISSUES CONTINUED

river Spey up to the Cairngorms mountain massif. Cairngorms Connect has a 200 year vision to achieve ecological enhancement, including expansion of native woodland to its natural extent, across a total area of around 60,000 Ha in which nature conservation is the primary driver for management. The partners are committed to delivering on the ground, ensuring people have a high quality experience and the local economy is supported.

**The East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership** is a collaboration between six estates including Mar Lodge, Mar, Invercauld, Balmoral, Glenavon and Glenlivet to collaborate on delivering the public interest priorities alongside estate objectives including sporting management. This includes management to provide increased woodland and scrub habitat alongside moorland management. The total area of the partnership includes around 50% of the National Park's moorland.

Catchment Partnerships on the rivers Spey, Dee and South Esk are also well established partnerships with a track record of delivering collaborative management and projects.

**Figure 3: Landscape-scale collaborations**



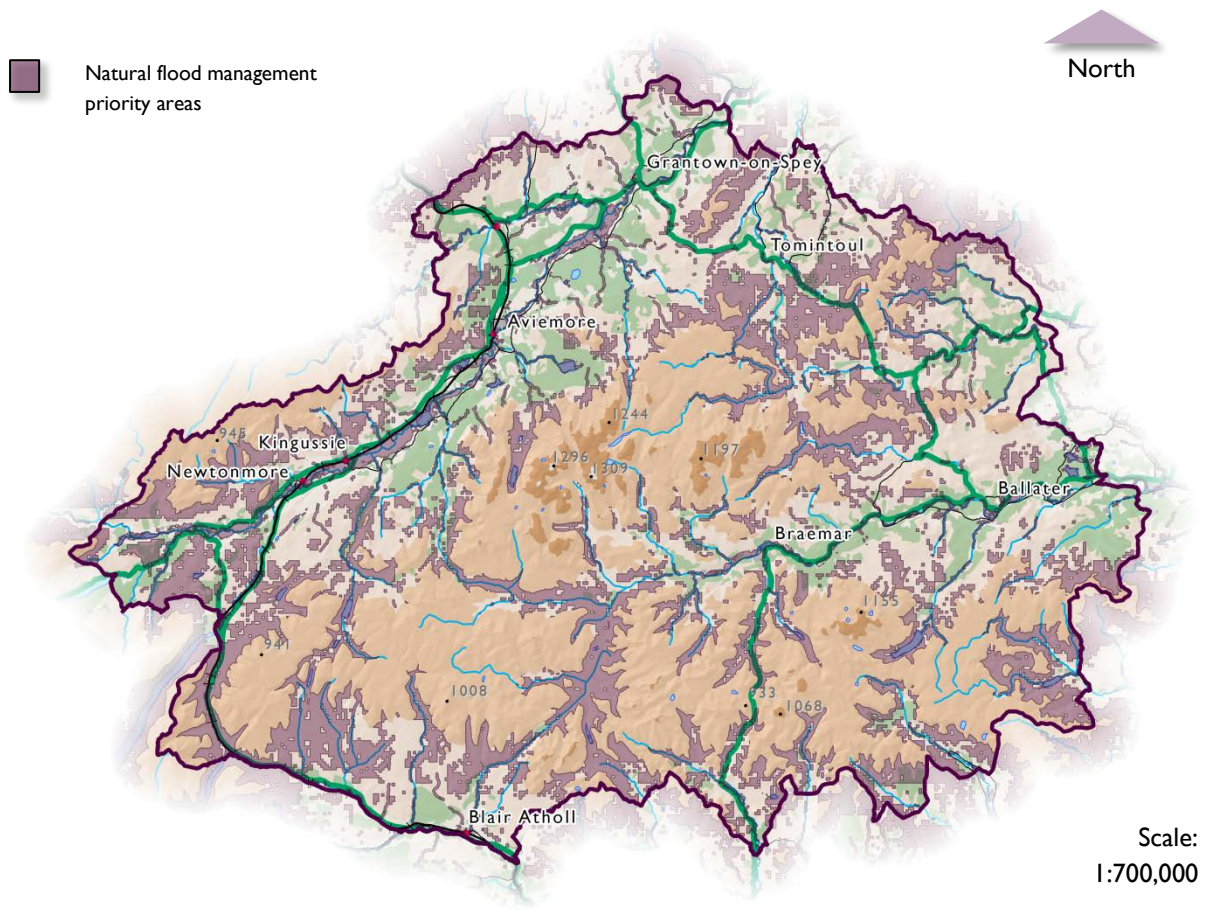
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## AGENDA FOR ACTION

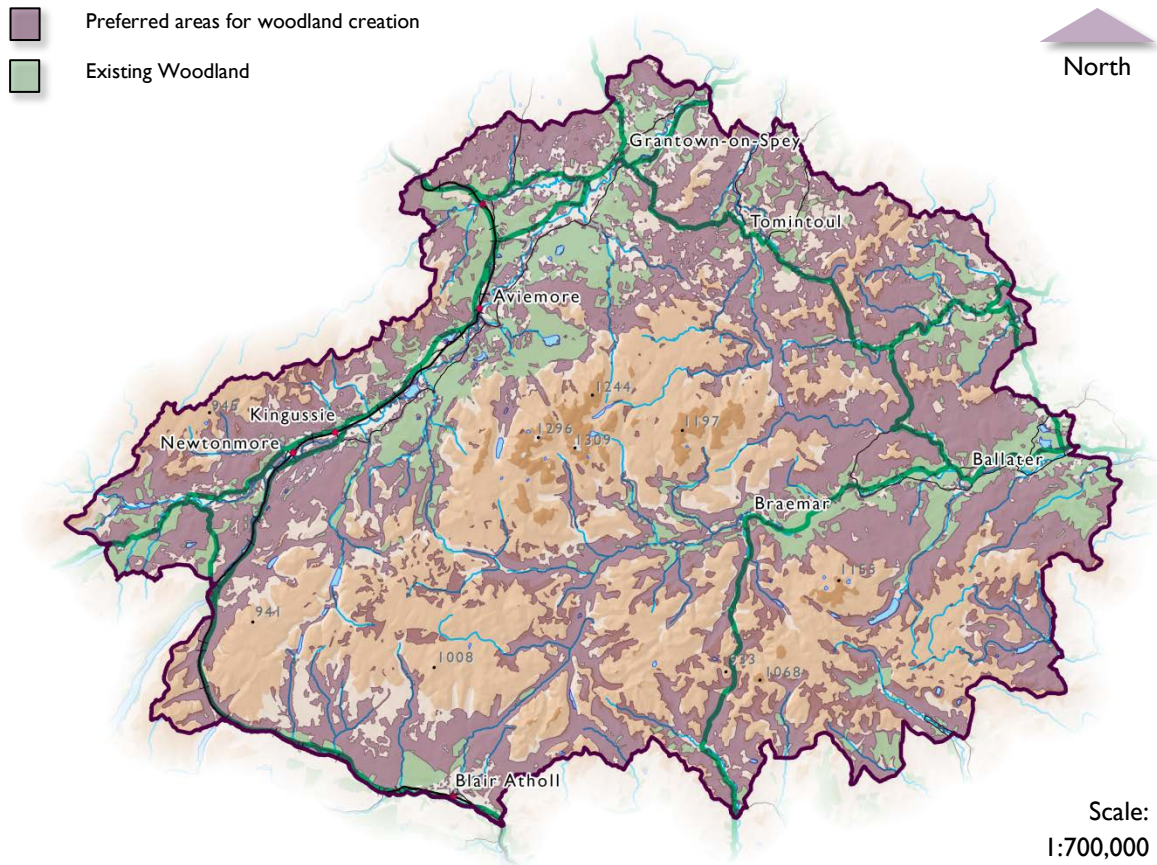
- a) Target effort and support to the most effective opportunities to deliver the public interest priorities such as woodland improvement and expansion, peatland restoration, flood risk management;
- b) Support and further develop the role of catchment partnerships as mechanisms to co-ordinate land use planning, and identify priority areas for natural flood management;
- c) Support land owner led collaborations to co-ordinate planning, delivery and monitoring across multiple land holdings, including Cairngorms Connect and the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership;
- d) Co-ordinate habitat, recreation and development management to secure the capercaillie population through delivery of the Capercaillie Framework;
- e) Deliver co-ordinated conservation action through the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership;
- f) Develop a regional Natura Plan for the suite of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in the Cairngorms National Park. The plan will address conservation objectives, measures, and priorities for the suite of sites. It will seek to enhance delivery of favourable condition and integrate site management with broader conservation objectives beyond the designated sites;
- g) Plan proactively for the potential and management implications of beaver populations;
- h) Consider options to provide appropriate public recognition where large areas of land are managed for nature conservation;
- i) Continue to direct public funds to support delivery of public benefits and explore new opportunities for funding including, for example, carbon management and voluntary conservation contributions.

**Figure 4: Natural flood management priority areas**



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**Figure 5: Preferred areas for targeting woodland creation**



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## PRIORITY 2

### Deer management

**Key policies: 1.5, 1.6, 1.7**

#### KEY ISSUES

Deer management is integral to delivering the public interest priorities set out in the Partnership Plan. These include priorities for woodland expansion (both productive and montane woodland), peatland restoration and designated sites as well as employment.

There has been a longstanding policy ambition in the Cairngorms to manage deer at levels that protect and enhance habitats, from the Cairngorms Working Party (1992) through to current National Park policy. Significant progress has been made in many parts of the National Park in both reducing deer impacts and improving management planning and collaboration by Deer Management Groups. While deer densities and management objectives will vary, the continued effort to maintain lower deer numbers and associated impacts is delivering further enhancement on the ground.

Through the period of this Plan we aim to continue the current direction of travel in which deer numbers and consequent impacts are reduced, where deer welfare is improved and sport stalking in a high quality environment continues to make a valuable economic contribution in the National Park. In the longer term this will lead to having fewer, good quality deer in a better quality environment.

Research indicates that reducing red deer numbers and moving towards a more balanced stag to hind ratio can result in a sporting resource of better quality stags with greater carcass weights and better antlers, as well as improved fecundity in hinds and reduced winter mortality. Access to improved grazing and woodland shelter can also improve the carcass weight and welfare of red deer. There are therefore welfare advantages as well as habitat advantages to moving in this direction.

The National Park already includes a number of well recognised examples where reducing the density of deer has resulted in significant woodland regeneration and habitat restoration. In some of these areas deer densities have been recorded as being temporarily well below five per km<sup>2</sup>. Very low densities are required to enable tree seedlings to establish but in time, with increased food availability and shelter, the habitat can again support more deer. In some places short term rotational fencing will help deliver this change.

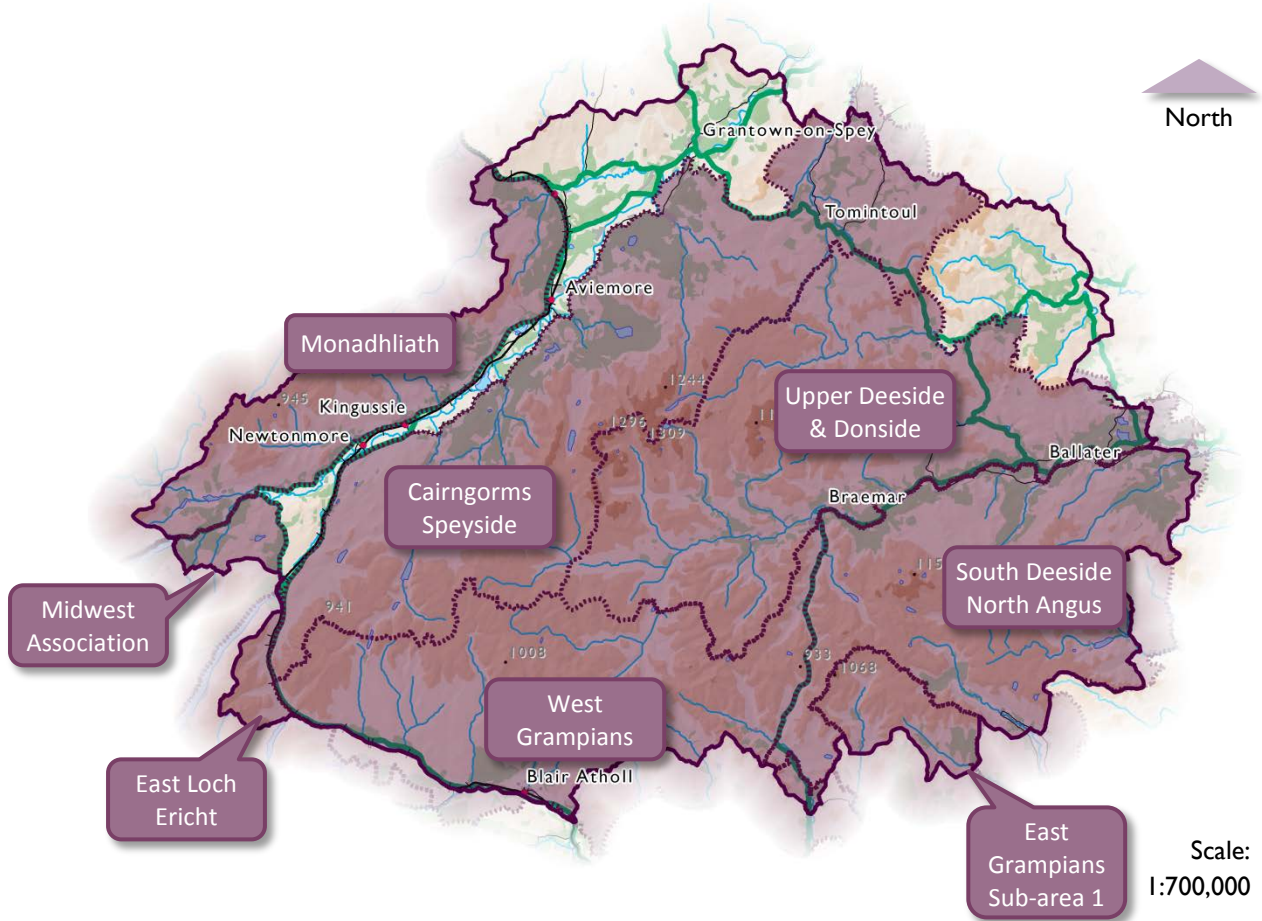


## KEY ISSUES CONTINUED

Deer densities and impacts will vary over time and support should be provided for population modelling and habitat impact assessments at group and landholding scale to target management to local circumstances. Deer impacts also need to be considered alongside impacts of other herbivores, climate and management factors. But the scale and connectivity of habitats and designated sites in the National Park requires a collaborative effort across the whole area to maintain deer numbers at a level which enables delivery of the public interest priorities and reduces marked differences across land management boundaries. Where habitat enhancement is restricted by management objectives which seek to maintain higher red deer densities, significantly above ten per km<sup>2</sup>, our aim is for the density of deer to be reduced.

Increasingly the roe deer population in the National Park also needs more collaborative management, in order to make the most of it as a sporting resource and to manage potential impacts. It is important that populations of all deer species including red, roe, fallow, sika and reindeer continue to be monitored to inform management.

**Figure 6: Deer Management Groups covering the Cairngorms National Park**



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## **AGENDA FOR ACTION**

We recognise the challenges that continuing the transition to a long-term direction of maintaining lower deer numbers brings for some managers, both in practical implementation and management objectives. During the period of this Plan we will work with land managers and Deer Management Groups to use population modelling, adaptive management and monitoring to demonstrate whether a more balanced ratio of stags to hinds can deliver reduced impacts and welfare benefits while maintaining a sport stalking resource.

Public agencies will support delivery through deer management groups by:

- a) Providing clarity on the public interest priorities and developing spatial mapping approaches to show these;
- b) Supporting the use of population modelling, herbivore impact assessments and habitat monitoring to inform management;
- c) Supporting an adaptive approach by monitoring the habitat, economic and welfare implications of changes in the context of the Deer Code;
- d) Supporting greater co-ordination of roe deer management and associated habitat and economic benefits, and collation of population information on all deer species;
- e) Supporting Deer Management Groups and facilitating communication and joint action across Deer Management Group boundaries where necessary.



## PRIORITY 3

### Moorland management

**Key policies: 1.5, 1.6, 1.7**

#### KEY ISSUES

The open moorlands of the Cairngorms are an integral part of the landscape character of the National Park and a valuable habitat. Moorland covers approximately 40% of the Park with a further 30% classified as the higher montane zone. Moorland is used for both field sports and farming and its management is key to delivering several public interest priorities including peatland restoration, flood risk management, species conservation and landscape enhancement.

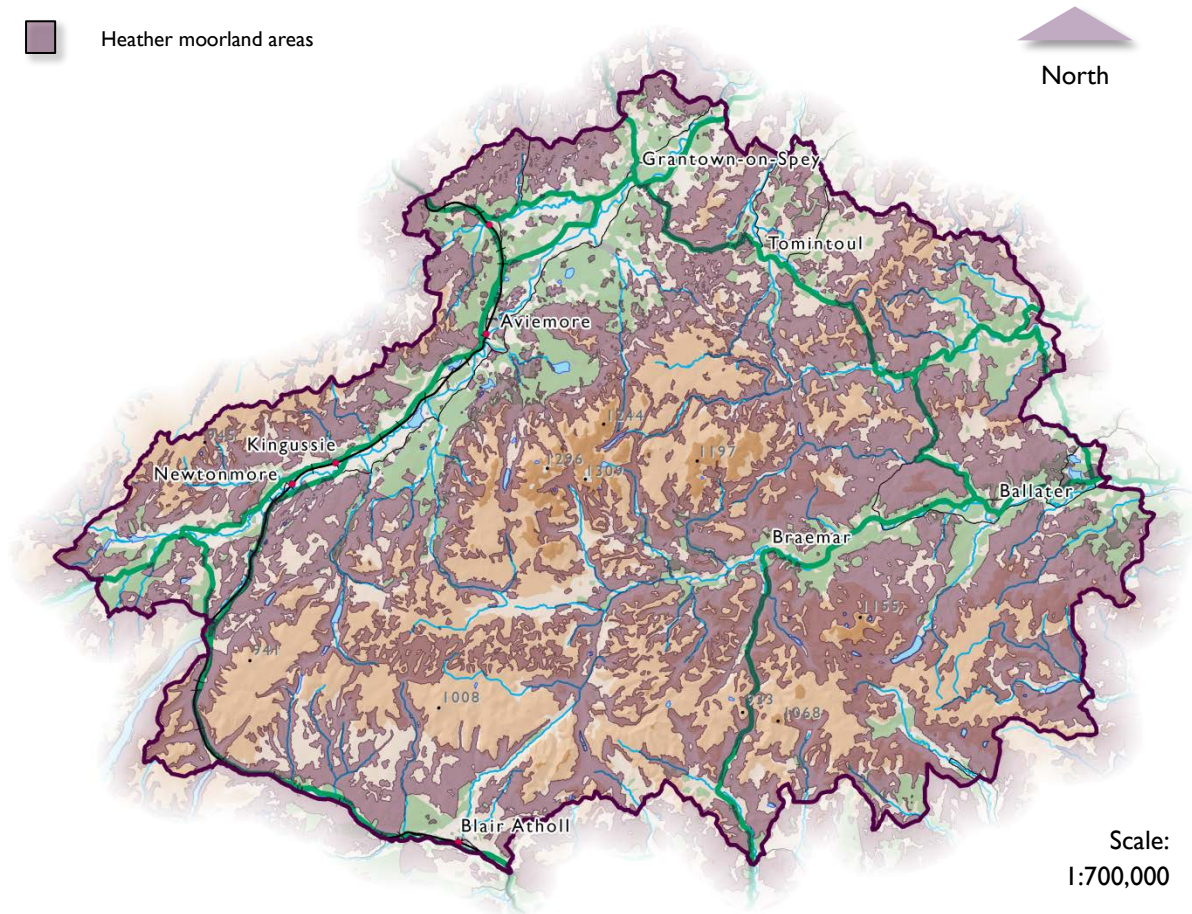
This range of demands and the need to integrate land use change such as woodland expansion creates a challenge to reconcile different objectives. Creating a further 5000 Ha of woodland expansion will not significantly change the open character of the National Park given the scale of open ground. There are many opportunities to integrate more woodland into the landscape alongside areas of moorland, particularly to help connect the forest network. There are also many opportunities to increase the habitat structure and diversity within moorlands.

Nearly half of the National Park comprises peat soils, of which around half is greater than 0.5m depth. Damage caused by past drainage, trampling and inappropriate grazing or burning reduces its effectiveness in carbon storage and water regulation. Restoration can result in significantly increased carbon storage and other benefits.

Good moorland management makes a significant contribution to delivering the conservation priorities set out in the Partnership Plan. In some places however, the intensity of management measures to maintain or increase grouse populations is out of balance with delivering wider public interest priorities.

During the course of this Plan period we seek to establish, deliver and promote a shared understanding of what good moorland management looks like in the Cairngorms National Park. There is national guidance and current initiatives such as the revised muirburn code, and the Principles of Moorland Management. We will work with moorland managers and all relevant interests to agree what practical implementation of these means in a Cairngorms context and to deliver greater public benefits alongside other estate management objectives.

**Figure 7: Heather moorland areas within the Cairngorms National Park**



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## AGENDA FOR ACTION

The focus of action for this Plan period is:

- To deliver and recognise good practice in moorland management;
- To eliminate raptor persecution and increase raptor populations;
- To contribute to woodland, peatland and designated site targets.

Partners will support delivery and recognition of good practice in moorland management which will include:

- a) Improving a shared definition and understanding of healthy moorland ecosystems;
- b) Delivering more habitat and species diversity within and alongside moorlands;
- c) Implementing guidance and trialling new approaches emerging from national initiatives, for example: mapping what implementation of the revised muirburn code means, using the Principles of Moorland Management and using the lessons of the Understanding Predation project to share knowledge and data;
- d) Minimising landscape impacts through a presumption against new constructed tracks in open moorland;

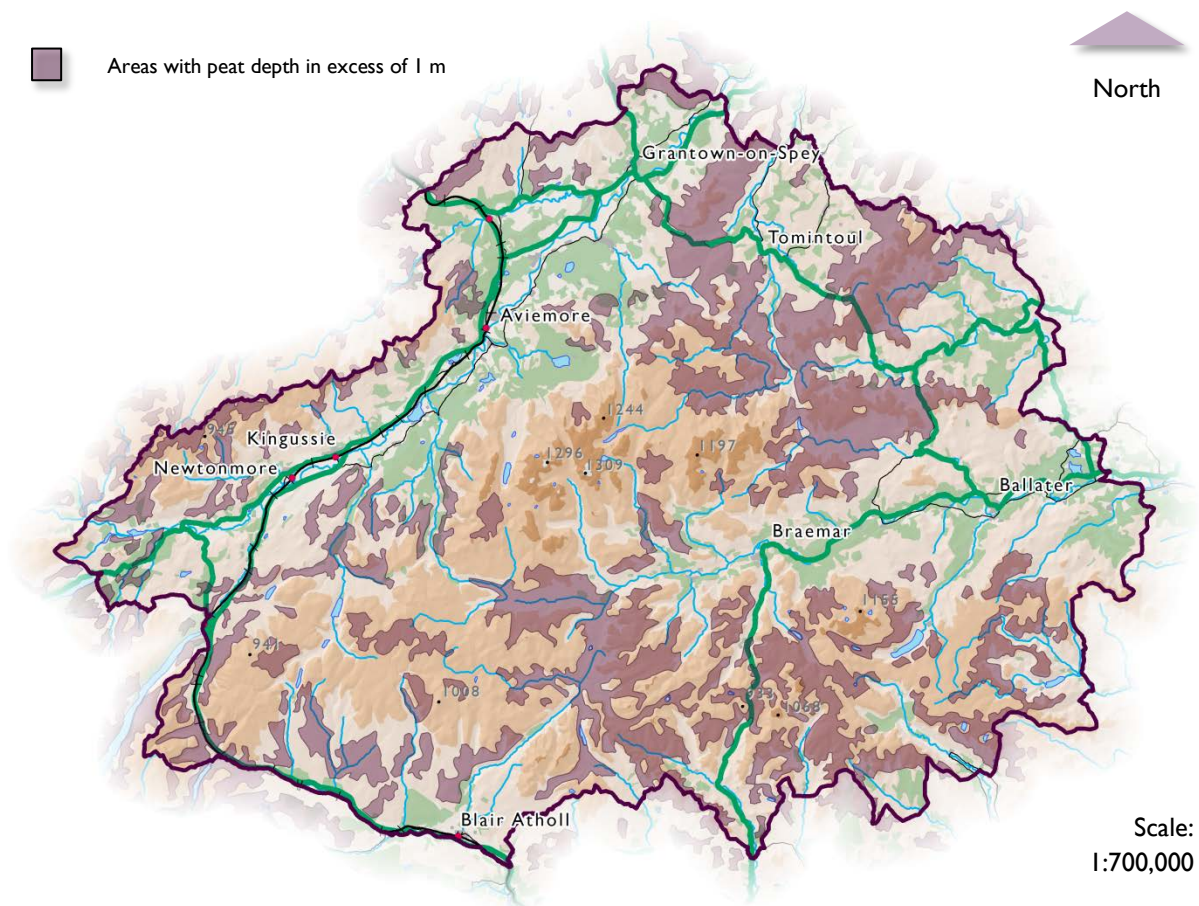
Partners will work to improve raptor populations in the National Park through:

- e) Eliminating the illegal killing of raptors through increased wildlife crime enforcement capacity and recognition for good management;
- f) Developing a multi partner golden eagle project which includes further analysis on occupancy following the 2016 national survey, informs management and develops the wildlife tourism opportunities associated with golden eagles;

Partners will support effective integration of objectives, including:

- g) Delivering peatland restoration and securing peatland for the long term;
- h) Integrating woodland expansion and montane woodland within and around moorlands;
- i) Supporting a more collaborative approach to integrating objectives for conservation, sport and woodland through the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and with other estates;
- j) Establishing an Upland Advisory Forum to address the integration of land use objectives and bring together all relevant interests to shape good practice in the Cairngorms National Park.

**Figure 8: Areas with peat depth in excess of one metre**



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## Conservation delivery framework

Targets		Indicators
5000 Ha of woodland expansion by 2022		Ha of new woodland
5000 Ha of peatland restoration by 2022		Ha of restored peatland
Increase the proportion of designated sites in favourable condition from the 2017 baseline of 81.8%		% of designated sites in favourable condition
Delivery partnerships		
Cairngorms Nature Partnership	Catchment Management Partnerships	Deer Management Groups
Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership	East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership	Cairngorms Connect
Delivery organisations		
Land managers and farmers		
Scottish Land and Estates		
National Farmers Union of Scotland		
Scottish Natural Heritage		
Forestry Commission Scotland		
Forest Enterprise Scotland		
ConFor		
Scottish Environment Protection Agency		
Scottish Gamekeepers Association		
Environment NGOs		
Community Development Organisations		
Local Authorities		
Key documents		
Cairngorms Nature Action Plan		
Capercaillie Framework		
Flood Risk Management Strategies and Local Plans		
Catchment Management Plans		
Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan		
Cairngorms Forest & Woodland Strategy (to be completed 2017)		

## Conservation policy framework

**Long-term outcome: A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced**

### **Policy 1.1**

The management and use of land should deliver multiple benefits – delivering the public interest priorities set out in the Partnership Plan in conjunction with private objectives. This will be supported by:

- a) a long-term planned approach by land based businesses to delivering environmental, economic and social benefits;
- b) support for land managers to plan and deliver environmental and social benefits underpinned by sound economic businesses;
- c) research to support management options;
- d) linking land management planning with community action planning.

### **Policy 1.2**

Enhance the resilience of habitats, species and land use to climate change, pest and disease risks, with a particular focus on:

- a) collaborating on land use and flood management, including natural flood management, through river catchment management plans;
- b) enhancing the health and connectivity of habitats;
- c) expanding woodland on appropriate soils;
- d) securing protection and sustainable management of peat and carbon-rich soils and restoring them where degraded.

All proposals to deliver these objectives will always ensure that the integrity of designated sites is maintained.

### **Policy 1.3**

Conserve and enhance the special landscape qualities by:

- a) conserving and enhancing wildness qualities;
- b) maintaining and promoting dark skies;
- c) enhancements that also deliver habitat improvements;
- d) enhancing opportunities to enjoy and experience the landscapes of the Park;
- e) applying a presumption against new constructed tracks in open moorland.

### **Policy 1.4**

Conserve and enhance habitat quality and connectivity while ensuring the integrity of designated sites is maintained, with a particular focus on:

- a) woodland enhancement and expansion, including productive, montane, farm and riparian woodlands;
- b) wetland conservation and enhancement;
- c) protection and improvement of the water environment;
- d) delivering a combination of ecosystem services including natural flood management, carbon sequestration and storage, timber and food production.

**Policy 1.5**

Conserve and enhance the species for which the Cairngorms National Park is most important, with a particular focus on:

- a) species whose conservation status is in decline or at risk;
- b) tackling and reducing the impacts of invasive non-native species;
- c) engaging people on species that are important in the National Park;
- d) promoting biological recording of species in the National Park.

**Policy 1.6**

Support collaboration across ownership boundaries and between interests to reduce conflicts in species and wildlife management including:

- a) deer and moorland management;
- b) combating wildlife crime;
- c) species reintroductions.

**Policy 1.7**

Conserve and enhance the cultural heritage that helps to create the sense of place and identity of communities within the National Park by:

- a) protecting archaeological sites and their settings and promoting understanding of their significance;
- b) ensuring appropriate advice and investigation for archaeology is used to inform proposals for land use change;
- c) protecting and enhancing the built heritage and designed landscapes;
- d) promoting opportunities to enjoy and celebrate the cultural heritage of the National Park, including its arts, sports and community heritage.



## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The Cairngorms National Park is an international visitor destination with outstanding natural and cultural attractions, and a wide range of opportunities for recreation enjoyed by people travelling to the Park and those that live here. It is an accessible place of 'wildness' for enjoyment, activity and learning.

Maintaining the outstanding environment that visitors seek out is vital for tourism to thrive, so much of the work in this area is underpinned by the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism and we continue to see this as a key way of monitoring and evaluating this activity.

Since designation in 2003 there has been significant investment in visitor infrastructure, including the path network. We have seen the establishment of a strong, well-recognised brand for the Cairngorms National Park. Some 91% of visitors know they are in a National Park, and for 63% of overseas visitors the area's status as a National Park is an important factor in their decision to visit. Visitor satisfaction is high, but we know from international comparisons that expectations will continue to increase. We need to continue to provide the infrastructure that meets visitors' expectations and helps manage recreation impacts on this fragile area.

Visitor numbers have steadily grown over the last five years to around 1.7m per year and we expect this trend of steady growth to continue. However, most of this increase has been in particular areas in the western Cairngorms so there is an opportunity to spread visitors throughout the National Park and improve the year round offer. People on low incomes, people with a disability and people from minority groups are less likely to visit the National Park and there is considerable scope for activity to encourage a wider range of visitors to the area.

There has been significant investment in the visitor infrastructure including Speyside Way and Old Logging Way, used by 60,000 people each year, and mountain biking facilities at Laggan and Glenlivet. The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust are leading the second major Heritage Lottery project restoring upland paths. Visitor centres, ranger bases and information points have been refurbished and visitor information and interpretation greatly improved.

Confidence in the visitor economy appears high with several private partners planning large new attractions or upgrades to popular facilities. There is agreement on the long-term improvements needed to the publicly owned land at Cairngorm and Glenmore. Work continues on developing and promoting the Snow Roads Scenic Route in the eastern Cairngorms as a major new attraction.

In 2015, the 25,000th John Muir Award in the Cairngorms National Park was presented. This indicates the quality and extent of outdoor learning opportunities available in the National Park – something we want to continue to build on to benefit people across Scotland. The Active Cairngorms partnership is now established, connecting the health, outdoor recreation and active travel sectors with ambitious targets to improve levels of physical activity.

## Our big visitor experience challenges for the next five years

### 1. Enhancing the quality of the Park as a tourism destination

- Investing in maintaining and upgrading key off-road routes including the Speyside Way, Deeside Way and core paths;
- Delivering a consistent high quality of visitor welcome through businesses, communities and ranger services;
- Improving the quality of visitor information and interpretation at major visitor attractions.

### 2. Delivering Active Cairngorms – increasing and broadening participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity

- Promoting greater participation and use of the outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities by residents and visitors as part of Scotland's 'natural health service';
- Encouraging inactive and moderately active people to become more active and stay active;
- Working with communities and recreational interests to manage recreation impacts on sensitive habitats and species;
- Delivering significant active travel improvements through design of places and transport infrastructure.

### 3. Engaging more people across Scotland in making the most of the Cairngorms National Park through learning and recreation

- Developing further the outstanding outdoor learning opportunities to benefit a wider range of people;
- Making it easier for all sectors of society to enjoy the National Park;
- Promoting and delivering volunteering opportunities;
- Encouraging visitors to contribute to maintaining and improving the National Park.

## These will help deliver the following national strategies

- Tourism Scotland 2020
- A More Active Scotland
- National Transport Strategy
- National Walking and Cycling Strategies

## They will also help deliver the following public interest priorities for land use

- High quality outdoor access network
- Visitor information and engagement
- Business and employment



## Visitor experience priorities for 2017 - 2022

The following pages set out the key visitor experience priorities which will guide the work of partners over the Plan period. Partners' work under these priorities will help to meet the visitor experience challenges and deliver the relevant public interest land use priorities.



### PRIORITY 4

Visitor infrastructure and information



### PRIORITY 5

Active Cairngorms



### PRIORITY 6

Learning and inclusion



## PRIORITY 4

### Visitor infrastructure and information

**Key policies: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3**

#### KEY ISSUES

The visitor economy is more critical to the Cairngorms National Park than anywhere else in rural Scotland, supporting some 43% of employment in the area. It is vital to enhance the quality of place and visitor infrastructure so that it continues to attract visitors to the area. The dualling of the A9 will bring opportunities and challenges over the next decade and it is important to maximise the benefits both during construction and on completion. The Snow Roads Scenic Route has the potential to be a major new attraction in the eastern Cairngorms.

Both nationally and internationally visitors are becoming more discerning, wanting quality experiences that are authentic and distinctive. Continued use of the National Park designation to celebrate the unique qualities of the Cairngorms will resonate with visitors. New ways of providing engaging and timely information to meet the changing needs of visitors will be required. Partners that provide visitor information will need ongoing support. These include ranger services, visitor information centres, community information centres and tourism businesses.

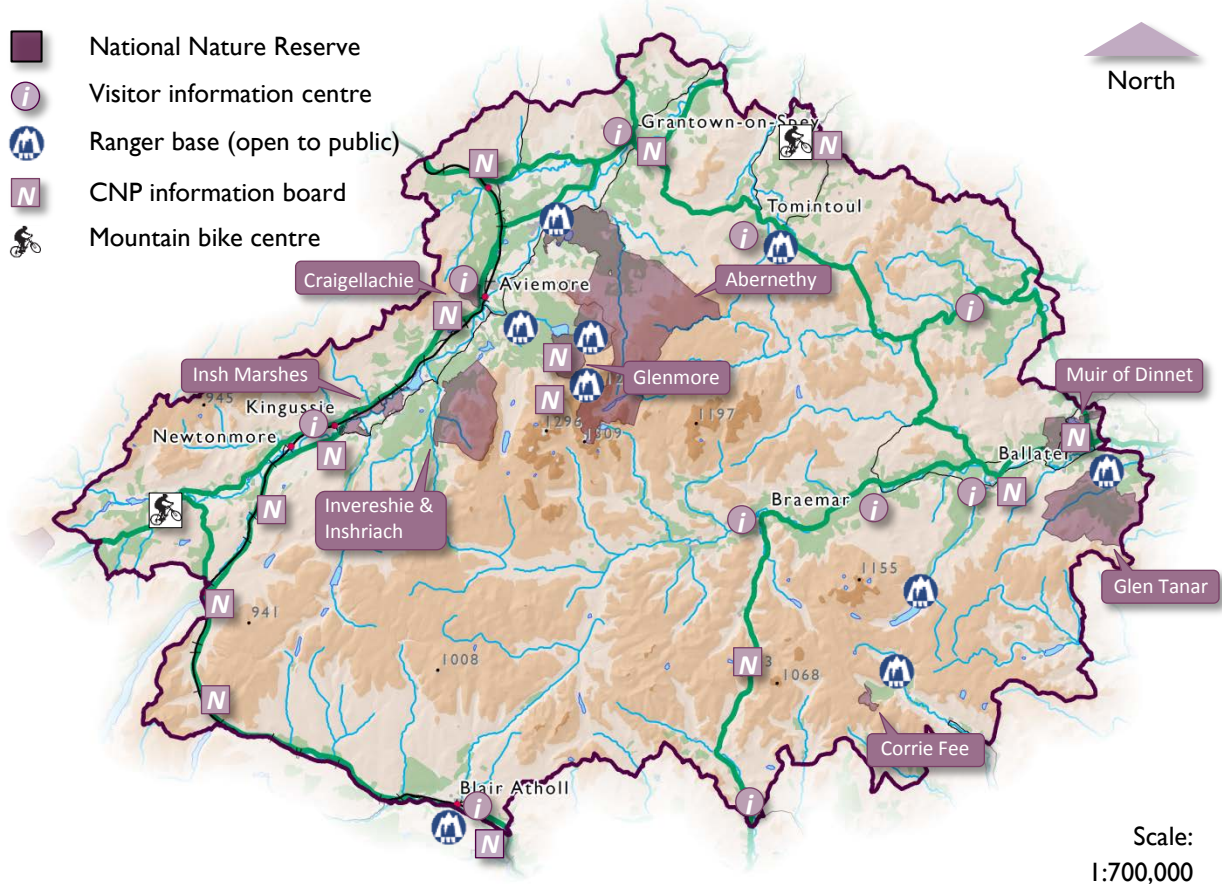
There are opportunities to attract more international visitors as well as a wider cross section of society. The eastern Cairngorms would benefit from more visitors and there is scope across the National Park to attract more people in the 'shoulder months'. Improvements to the visitor experience identified in Cairngorm and Glenmore, and Tomintoul and Glenlivet need to be progressed.

Remaining sections of key long distance paths need completing as do improvements to paths in the mountains, but the greater challenge is securing reliable funds to maintain the paths throughout the National Park. A visitor giving scheme that allows people to easily and willingly contribute to the maintenance of paths is a priority to develop.

Public transport is limited. There are opportunities to better co-ordinate and promote public transport and active travel for visitors.

The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership is key to co-ordinating the partners' actions that are needed to meet the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. Smarter partnership working will be required to make the most of declining public funds.

**Figure 9: Visitor infrastructure and information across the National Park**



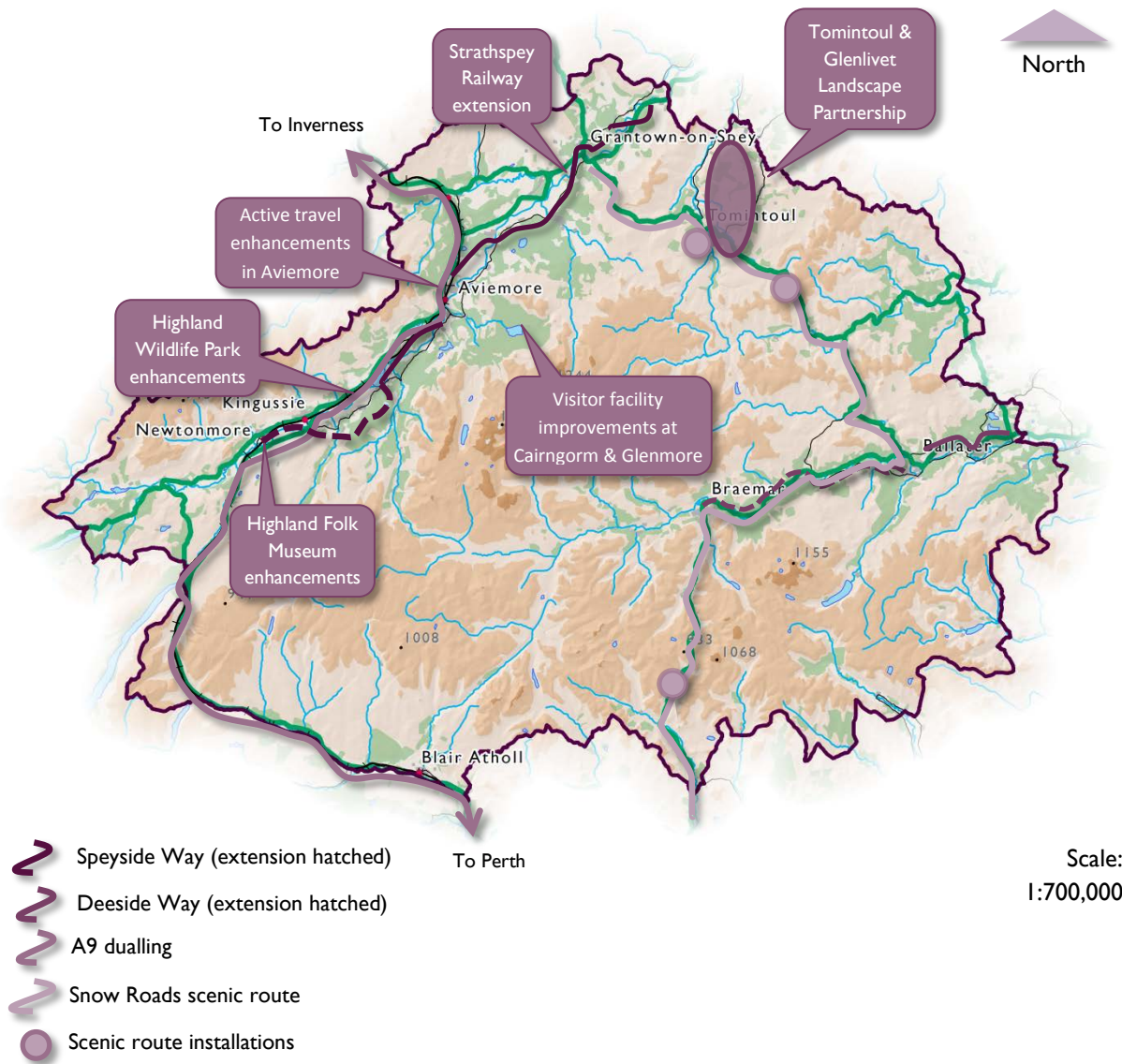
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## AGENDA FOR ACTION

Partners will support delivery of high quality visitor infrastructure and information with actions including:

- Developing new ways including visitor giving to fund infrastructure investment and maintaining and upgrading key off-road routes including Speyside Way, Deeside Way and the Core Paths network;
- Delivering a consistent high quality of visitor welcome through new and improved information, support for ranger services and partnership working to support businesses, communities and visitor attractions;
- Improving the visitor infrastructure in Cairngorm and Glenmore, and Tomintoul and Glenlivet;
- Completing the 'Snow Roads Scenic Route' and developing a similar experience along the A9;
- Encouraging the provision of low cost camping and motor home sites in appropriate locations;
- Improving visitor transport options and information.

**Figure I0: Public investment priorities for visitor infrastructure**



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## PRIORITY 5

### Active Cairngorms

#### Key policies: 2.3

#### KEY ISSUES

Some 20% of the Scottish population are inactive and physical inactivity is the second biggest cause of mortality, leading to 2,500 deaths in Scotland every year. Increasing outdoor physical activity can lead to improvements in many health conditions, from heart disease to mental health issues.

The Cairngorms National Park has the access infrastructure, destination appeal and partnerships required to promote increased physical activity in both residents and visitors. The National Park has the potential to be a rural exemplar of active lifestyles and active travel.

It is clear from feedback that more needs to be done to promote existing opportunities for walking and cycling. There is also an ongoing need to promote responsible outdoor access in this fragile environment with a particular emphasis on responsible access with dogs, wildlife disturbance and fire risk.

Encouraging the inactive and less active to make positive changes is difficult. However, the Active Cairngorms Partnership brings together a wide range of partners with the common aim of improving people's health and wellbeing. This group has the potential to initiate such changes.

New developments in and around Aviemore, including a new hospital and A9 dualling, offer the opportunity to improve access infrastructure and promotion to encourage more active travel by both residents and visitors.

Health walk schemes have been successful at increasing activity in residents around the National Park but these need to be sustained. There is potential to use this approach with GP referrals and to make links with schools walking programmes and other opportunities. There is wide ranging support to create more opportunities and make it easier to undertake environmental volunteering. A successful volunteering programme will require the support of communities, land managers and ranger services.

## **AGENDA FOR ACTION**

Partners will support delivery of Active Cairngorms with actions including:

- a) Using partnership in the Cairngorms National Park as an example of how to support delivery of Scotland's Natural Health Service;
- b) Encouraging residents and visitors to responsibly enjoy and use the National Park for physical activity as part of daily life;
- c) Targeting people currently living sedentary lifestyles where inactivity is the norm; older adults, young girls and those living with long-term medical conditions;
- d) Maintaining and growing health walks through the Cairngorms Walking project and linking with other opportunities to be active;
- e) Delivering more environmental volunteering opportunities and developing volunteer rangers;
- f) Better co-ordination and promotion of public transport and active travel;
- g) Improving opportunities for active travel in Aviemore that deliver improved transport connections for visitors and residents.



## PRIORITY 6

### Learning and inclusion

#### Key policies: 2.4

#### KEY ISSUES

The Cairngorms is Britain's largest and most diverse National Park. Half the Park is designated for nature conservation and it contains a quarter of the UK's rare and endangered species creating outstanding opportunities for outdoor learning. The area is uniquely placed to look at the interaction of land management, nature conservation and tourism. However, the National Park is relatively remote and there are perceptions that it is expensive and exclusive.

While much has been done to make the most of the National Park as a resource for outdoor learning through the curriculum, there is scope to expand this approach to the wider community, including family learning, community learning and development, and adult learning. There is more to be done to make information accessible and develop resources that make it easier to learn about the Cairngorms National Park.

The John Muir Award and Junior Ranger Programmes continue to provide structured opportunities for young people to actively learn about the National Park. These initiatives need to be sustained. Again, more could be done to make it easier for other learning programmes to utilise the National Park.

There are still barriers for under-represented groups to engage with the National Park that need to be addressed. Key under-represented groups are schools from socially deprived areas, people with disabilities, young people (under 24), people in lower income/socio-economic groups and people from black and minority ethnic communities.

There are opportunities to link work that promotes physical activity and volunteering to learning and inclusion outcomes.

Inclusive Cairngorms is an advisory forum on inclusion and equality issues which provides valuable support and advice on opportunities to encourage the Cairngorms National Park to be a 'Park for All'.

## **AGENDA FOR ACTION**

Partners will support delivery of best practice in learning and inclusion with actions including:

- a) Continuing to deliver existing outdoor learning programmes; John Muir Award and Junior Rangers;
- b) Providing an opportunity for children across Scotland to visit the Cairngorms National Park during their school life to learn about and connect with the Park in conjunction with National Nature Reserves and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park;
- c) Developing and promoting learning resources and training opportunities that make it easier for education providers to use the National Park;
- d) Raising awareness and understanding of the Park and the issues and choices involved in management of the Park;
- e) Creating a 'Park for All' by reducing barriers and inspiring a diversity of people to engage with and care for their National Park through lifelong learning;
- f) Using volunteering and physical activity to promote learning and inclusion.



## Visitor experience delivery framework

Targets		Indicators
Increase the economic impact of visitors to eastern and southern Cairngorms National Park from 21% to 25% of the total visitor economy		STEAM (tourism economic model) data
Increase the percentage of visitors using active travel during their stay to 19% by 2022		Visitor Survey – 2015 baseline was 16%
Support 30 volunteer rangers and 500 days of annual volunteering by 2022		Number of volunteer rangers and annual volunteering days
Delivery partnerships		
Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum	Scottish Government & Local Authority Outdoor Learning and Inclusion Partnerships	Cairngorms Tourism Partnership
Active Cairngorms Partnership	Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership	The Mountains and the People Project
Junior Ranger Programme	Inclusive Cairngorms	John Muir Award
Volunteer Cairngorms	Cairngorm & Glenmore Partnership	
Delivery organisations		
Tourism businesses	Cairngorms Business Partnership	
Land managers	VisitAberdeenshire	
NHS	Moray Speyside Tourism	
Ranger Services	Ramblers Scotland	
Backbone	Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust	
VisitScotland	John Muir Trust	
Forest Enterprise Scotland	Environmental NGOs	
Scottish Natural Heritage	Community organisations	
Local Authorities		
Key documents		
Active Cairngorms		
Cairngorms National Park Sustainable Tourism Action Plan		
Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy		

## Visitor experience policy framework

**Long-term outcome: People enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences**

### **Policy 2.1**

Provide a welcoming and high quality National Park experience for all by:

- a) delivering a visitor/customer experience that spans organisational boundaries;
- b) providing high quality co-ordinated information setting visitor experiences in the context of the National Park;
- c) enhancing the provision of ranger services to deliver visitor welcome and promote responsible access;
- d) building on the National Park brand and the promise it delivers.

### **Policy 2.2**

Promote sustainable tourism management with a particular focus on:

- a) co-ordinated promotion and management of the Cairngorms National Park as a visitor destination;
- b) ensuring high quality facilities and infrastructure are designed to manage the effects of visitor pressures on the natural heritage and communities;
- c) implementing and reviewing the sustainable tourism action plan for the Cairngorms National Park.

### **Policy 2.3**

Provide high quality opportunities for access and recreation, with a particular focus on:

- a) ensuring a high quality functional network of core paths and long distance routes;
- b) promoting the health benefits of outdoor recreation;
- c) identifying areas where particular management measures are needed in relation to delivering a high quality visitor experience whilst safeguarding sensitive environments and maintaining the integrity of designated sites;
- d) promoting responsible behaviour in enjoying and managing access.

### **Policy 2.4**

Provide opportunities for inspiration, learning and understanding through engaging with people, with a particular focus on:

- a) young people;
- b) opportunities to support the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence and education beyond school;
- c) enhancing volunteering opportunities;
- d) promoting a sense of shared ownership and responsibility towards Scotland's National Parks and rural environment

A landscape photograph showing a valley with a town, green fields, and mountains under a cloudy sky. The text 'RURAL DEVELOPMENT' is overlaid in large, purple, 3D-style letters. The scene is viewed from an elevated position, looking down into the valley. The foreground consists of rocky ground with some low-lying vegetation. The town below is a cluster of buildings, and the surrounding area is a mix of green fields and forested areas. The mountains in the background are hazy and covered in vegetation. The sky is filled with grey, overcast clouds.

# RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT

There is a strong economy and sense of community within the Cairngorms National Park compared with many rural areas, and this is underpinned by the Park's quality of environment and reputation as a great place to live and work. Many communities in the National Park are already taking the lead themselves through developing their own assets, improving facilities and services, and new legislation will enhance their opportunities to do so. Yet there remain many challenges, including access to housing that is affordable, digital connectivity and relatively low wages.

An economic strategy for the Park has been developed with the Cairngorms Business Partnership to provide focus on a strong and diversified economy. Further effort is required to see that work consolidated. The tourism sector accounts for around 43% of employment in the National Park and is a key strength of the economy. The National Park brand is now well established and recognised by visitors, and there has been major investment in tourism infrastructure and attractions. The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership brings together tourism providers and public agencies to collaborate in strengthening the tourism economy further. Land based businesses (farming, food and forestry) account for around 15% of employment and are integral to delivery of wider conservation and visitor experience goals.

Community Action Plans have been developed by all communities within the Park, setting out priorities and aligning partners' support and investment. These feed into other relevant strategies, including the Local Development Plan which sets out policies and proposals for built development and land use. Through the identification of the Tomintoul and Glenlivet area as a priority area in the previous Partnership Plan, partners directed significant support to the area's economic and social regeneration. There is now an active Development Trust managing local facilities and generating income from community assets and legacy projects that put the community in a much better position. During the period of this Partnership Plan, we expect to begin the process of providing focussed support to communities in the Dalwhinnie, Kingussie, Laggan and Newtonmore area.

According to the most recent projections from the National Records of Scotland, the number of households in the National Park is expected to increase by around 12% (approximately 900 new households) between 2012 and 2037. This is primarily because the population of the Park is generally ageing and more people are expected to live in smaller households. We need to maintain a supply of new housing that meets these needs. In order to ensure the continued vibrancy of the Park's economy, we also need to provide housing to allow the proportion of working age population to be maintained or to grow.

Whilst a significant number of houses have been built in the Park over recent years, not enough of them are of the appropriate size and price to meet the needs of communities. And, in parts of the National Park, there are many second and holiday homes which can mean getting access to housing is difficult for people who want to live and work in the Park. We need to change our approach to ensure we meet the needs of communities by making best use of the land which is available for new housing development.

## Our big rural development challenges for the next five years

### 1. Delivering housing that meets the needs of communities

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing, and ensuring that it remains affordable in the long-term;
- Helping to reduce the proportion of second homes by making sure that when new housing is built more of it is accessible to and targeted at people working in the National Park;
- Securing an appropriate level of public funding and making the most effective use of it to deliver affordable housing and infrastructure to meet local needs;
- Helping communities make the most of the right to buy land in order to secure local housing solutions;
- Meeting the bulk of housing needs by using the existing larger sites in the Local Development Plan and, in the future, enabling communities to grow in a more small-scale 'organic' way.

### 2. Community-led development and regeneration

- Identifying those communities most in need of support, and building their capacity to get the most out of new opportunities to shape their places;
- Making resources available to support community aspirations;
- Giving communities control over assets and helping them maximise their return;
- Increasing community resilience;
- Strengthening local democracy and participation;
- Supporting and encouraging a partnership approach between and within communities.

### 3. Strengthening and diversifying the economy of the Cairngorms National Park

- Strengthening the tourism sector, ensuring we continue to take a sustainable approach, and encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more;
- Strengthening other existing business sectors and encouraging start-ups and diversification;
- Improving access to housing for workers in the National Park;
- Improving digital communications infrastructure, especially in the remoter areas of the National Park.

## These will help deliver the following national strategies

- Scottish Government Economic Strategy
- Tourism Scotland 2020
- National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy
- More Homes Scotland

## They will also help deliver the following public interest priorities for land use

- Business and employment
- Community empowerment
- Housing and infrastructure

## Rural development priorities for 2017 - 2022

The following pages set out the key rural development priorities which will guide the work of partners over the Plan period. Partners' work under these priorities will help to meet the rural development challenges and deliver the relevant public interest land use priorities.



### **PRIORITY 7**

**Housing**



### **PRIORITY 8**

**Community capacity and empowerment**



### **PRIORITY 9**

**Economic development**





## PRIORITY 7

### Housing

**Key policies: 3.1, 3.2, 3.5**

#### KEY ISSUES

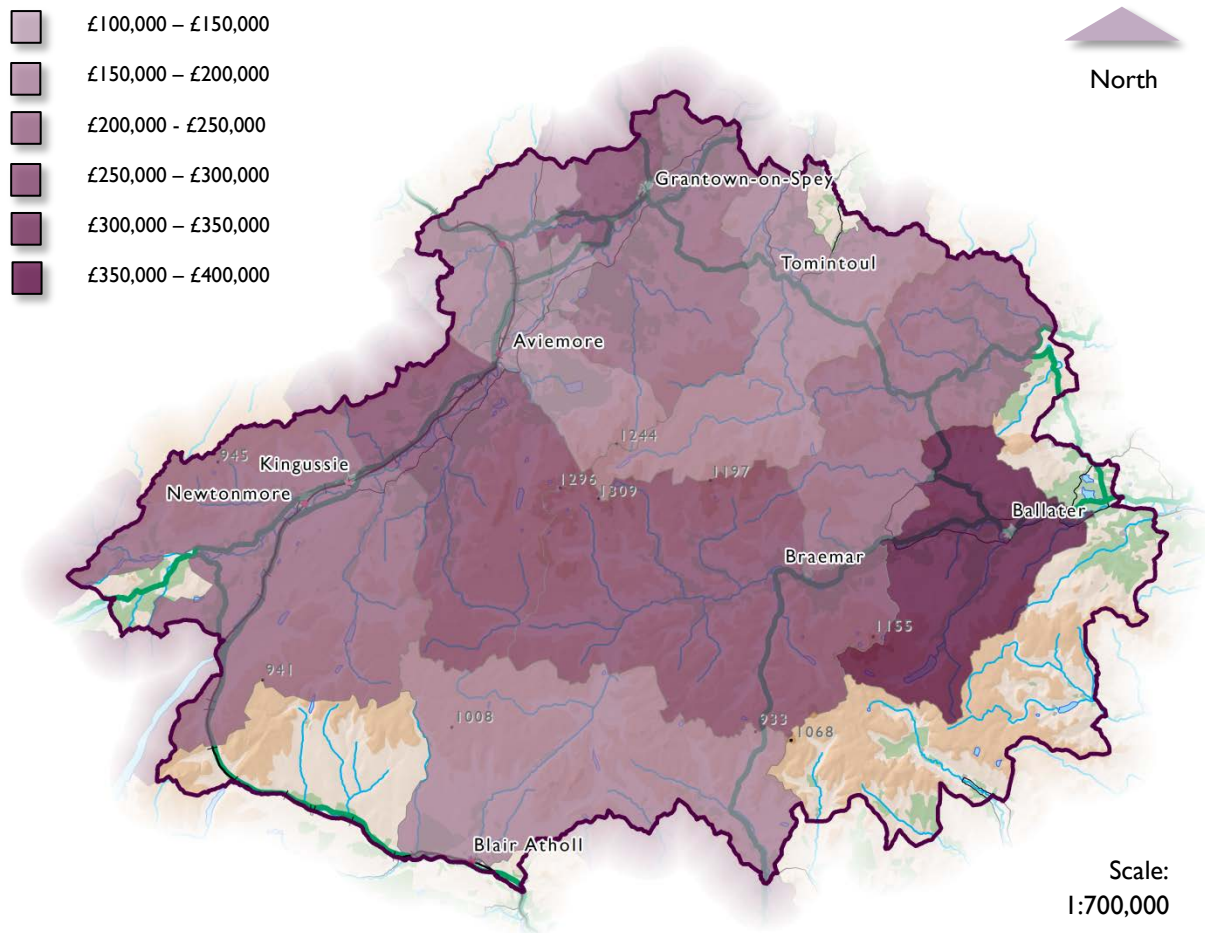
With evidence showing that median house prices are around six times higher than median household incomes, it is currently hard for many households that work within the National Park to access housing on the open market. This problem occurs across the Park but is particularly acute in certain areas, including Badenoch and Strathspey, and Deeside. Unless addressed, the lack of affordable housing is likely to have significant negative social and economic effects on local communities.

The Cairngorms National Park also experiences unique pressures in relation to second homes. Around 12% of all houses within the Park are second homes; a figure which is significantly higher than the Scottish average of around 1%. In certain areas of the Park, including parts of Badenoch and Strathspey and Deeside, the proportion of second homes exceeds 20%. Whilst second homes can bring significant benefits, they can add to affordability pressures for people working within the Park. High proportions of second homes can also have potential negative impacts on the vitality and vibrancy of communities.

In addition, there is a higher proportion of larger homes and a lower proportion of smaller ones within the National Park compared with Scotland as a whole. As well as exacerbating affordability problems, this does not fit well with projections of future housing need within the Park, which suggest a greater need for smaller homes.

A substantial number of houses have been built in the National Park in recent years. However, owing to the outstanding quality of the environment, there is a limited choice of sites that are capable of delivering housing to meet future needs. The higher costs associated with developing in rural areas such as the Park can also make delivering housing a challenge. All of this means we need to ensure that when new houses are built more of them are affordable to people working in the Park, and that the range and size of new houses are better targeted at meeting local needs.

**Figure 11: Median house prices by data zone<sup>3</sup> (2015)**



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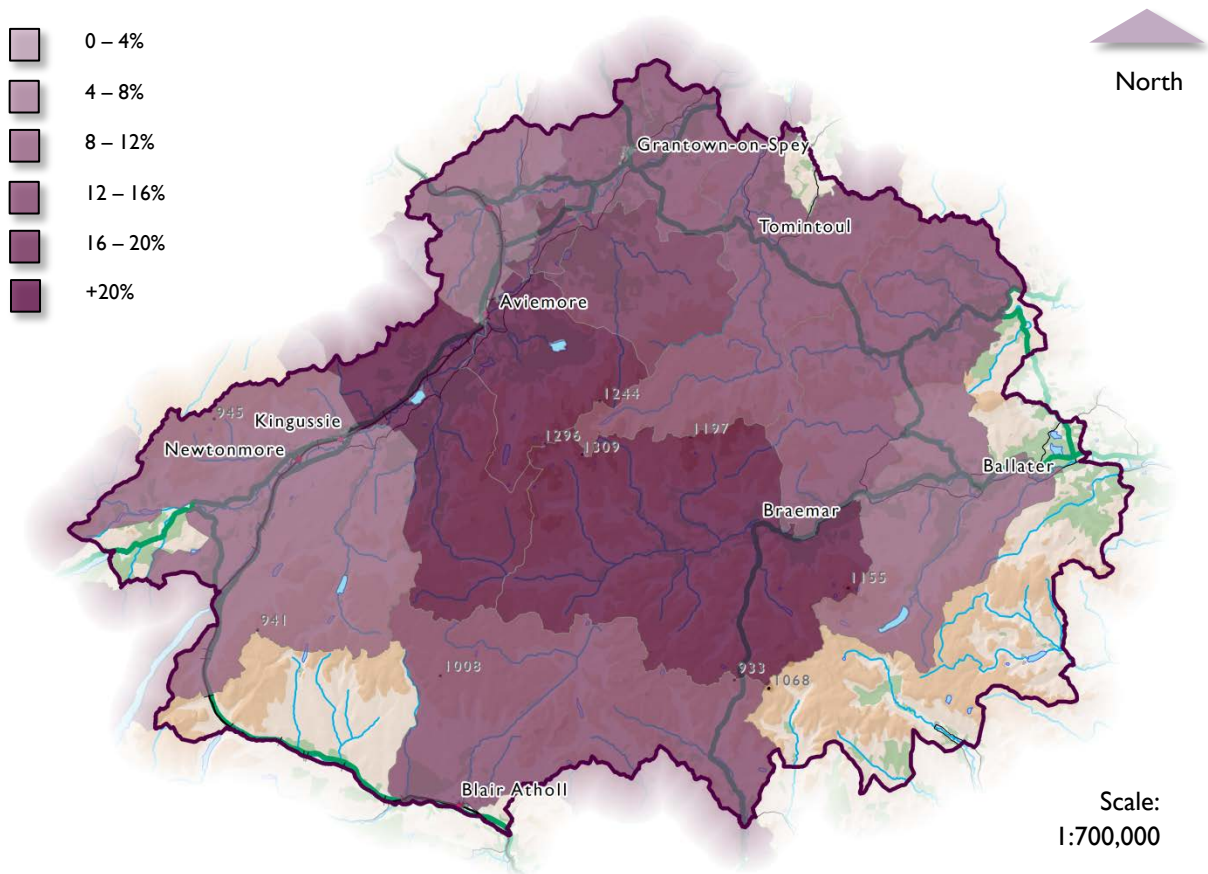
<sup>3</sup> Data zones are areas with a resident population of around 500 to 1,000 people. The resident population is not necessarily evenly distributed within any data zone. As data zones cover all parts of Scotland, their boundaries extend into sparsely populated and unpopulated areas.

## AGENDA FOR ACTION

Partners will respond to the unique housing challenges and pressures within the Cairngorms National Park by developing a special approach that is based on:

- a) Reducing the proportion of second homes in new developments by ensuring that new housing development is targeted at meeting local needs as far as possible;
- b) Maximising the proportion of new housing that is affordable in perpetuity;
- c) Identifying sites in the next Local Development Plan where the affordable housing contribution will be more than the normal national maximum of 25% because of acute affordability pressures and the shortage of supply;
- d) Using the next Local Development Plan to manage the nature of new open market housing so it is better targeted towards local needs (eg by seeking a greater mix of house types and sizes, with an emphasis towards smaller homes in new developments);
- e) Applying flexible planning policies to promote majority affordable housing developments and encourage the use of innovative delivery models to maximise the number of affordable homes that are built;
- f) Targeting public sector funding towards the National Park and to sites with the greatest potential for delivering affordable housing;
- g) Supporting communities to deliver community-led housing solutions, including by making the most of powers to buy land and taking a more pro-active role in management where appropriate;
- h) Promoting high standards of sustainable design and energy efficiency in new homes to ensure they are affordable in terms of lifetime running costs.

**Figure 12: Proportion of second homes by data zone<sup>4</sup> (2015)**



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<sup>4</sup> Data zones are areas with a resident population of around 500 to 1,000 people. The resident population is not necessarily evenly distributed within any data zone. As data zones cover all parts of Scotland, their boundaries extend into sparsely populated and unpopulated areas.



## **PRIORITY 8**

### **Community capacity and empowerment**

**Key policies: 3.3, 3.4**

#### **KEY ISSUES**

The Cairngorms National Park covers a large rural area of Scotland which includes a number of communities who are taking the lead in developing their own assets and improving facilities and services. These communities are unique and have their own contexts, but often have shared issues, challenges and opportunities.

Challenges include being geographically remote, with dispersed populations often some distance from the main service centres. In addition, the availability of community volunteers who can support and deliver community-led initiatives can be limited, with increasing pressure on support structures.

Whilst there are challenges, the National Park has a strong reputation as a place for community-led development, with several award-winning initiatives. Looking ahead there are increasing opportunities for communities to play a greater role in shaping their places, which can help to build capacity and allow communities to empower themselves.

Legislation in the form of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 will give communities additional rights to influence decisions which affect them, take control of community assets, and become more involved in the planning and delivery of services. However, as the legislation comes into force, communities will require sustained or increased support and guidance on what it means for them and how it can be implemented.

In addition, communities can benefit by learning from each other and there is a continued need to ensure that there are opportunities to share experiences which can help to build capacity and encourage greater community empowerment.

#### **AGENDA FOR ACTION**

Partners will support opportunities and actions to develop community capacity and help communities to empower themselves by:

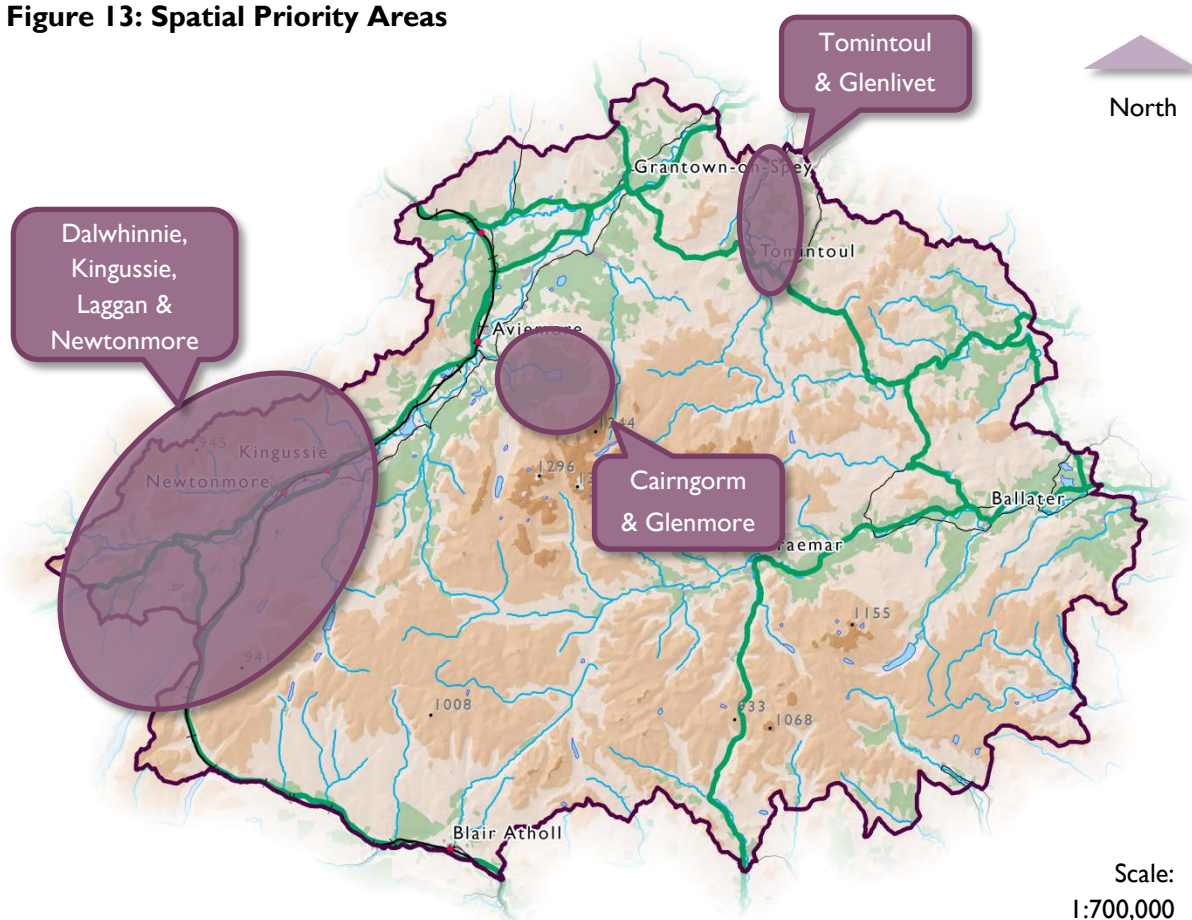
- a) Offering support to communities across the National Park through locally based support organisations and working with partner organisations (such as Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey and the Marr Area Partnership), with a presumption in favour of collaborative working;



## AGENDA FOR ACTION CONTINUED

- b) Supporting community groups to improve communication and engagement with their communities in order to enhance local democracy and participation;
- c) Continuing to support communities to review and update their Community Action Plans at least every five years;
- d) Working with community groups to improve succession planning and volunteering in order to allow them to take advantage of new opportunities and proactively address issues;
- e) Working collaboratively through community planning structures within the five Community Planning Partnership areas to provide consistent and clear support and information to communities;
- f) Continuing to offer support to the Association of Cairngorms Communities and using it as a forum for broader engagement;
- g) Establishing a new spatial priority area to provide an enhanced level of future assistance/collaboration over a focused time period to the Dalwhinnie, Kingussie, Laggan and Newtonmore area from 2019/20, making the most of investment in the A9 dualling project.

Figure 13: Spatial Priority Areas



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## **PRIORITY 9**

### **Economic development**

**Key policies: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3**

#### **KEY ISSUES**

The economy of the National Park is strong, business confidence is high and there is a good degree of networking and collaboration between businesses thanks to the work of the Cairngorms Business Partnership. Nevertheless, business development in the National Park does face challenges – for example, the limited access to high speed broadband and mobile communications services, both of which have become essential requirements for most businesses. Although the availability of high speed broadband has improved substantially in many of the most populated areas, there are still areas of the National Park with poor or no access.

The availability of small and start-up business units that are affordable is a further constraint that limits opportunity and constrains business creation. To tackle the issue needs co-ordination to match land and investment with businesses in suitable locations.

The availability of suitable housing for employees has become a more significant issue as house prices have increased. Many businesses struggle to recruit and retain staff because of high housing costs. With the lower paid sectors of tourism and land based businesses providing nearly 60% of employment in the National Park, this issue is relevant in almost every part of the Park. Access for workers to suitable housing is a weak link in the economic infrastructure of the National Park.

Public transport links in the National Park can be limited due to the relatively small and sparse population. There is potential to improve public transport links to visitor infrastructure in ways that increase visitor use and also improve the service benefits for residents and employees.

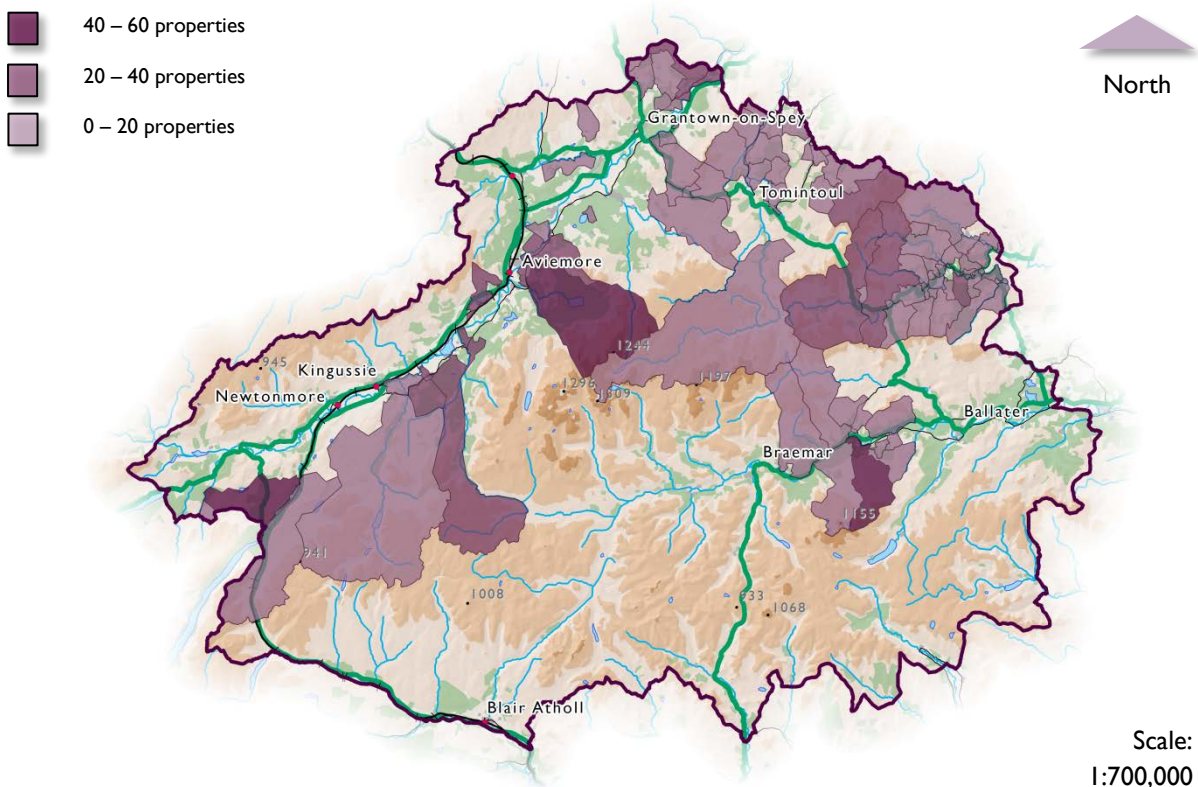
The strong tourism sector can be strengthened further by improving the quality of visitor facilities, customer service and information, building on the National Park brand and quality of the natural environment and promotion of the National Park destination as part of the suite of Scotland's regional destinations. The Economic Strategy for the Park also provides a focus on diversifying the economy. There is potential for diversification towards higher value sectors such as life science and specialist technology, which would also help to increase average wages within the Park.

## AGENDA FOR ACTION

Partners will deliver the current Economic Strategy for the Park to 2018 and then review, focussing on action plans for key business sectors:

- a) Developing sector-specific plans (eg forestry, food and drink) to tackle investment, enhance skills through stronger links with higher and further education, improve long-term resilience and increase average wages, as well as building business on the natural capital of the National Park;
- b) Supporting Cairngorms Community Broadband to deliver superfast broadband in the hardest to reach parts of the Park;
- c) Continuing to improve physical infrastructure, including access to affordable housing and digital connectivity;
- d) Maximising the opportunities for businesses, communities and visitors from the A9 dualling project;
- e) Review implications and options for the farming sector as changes in long-term support become clearer;
- f) Using the next Local Development Plan (LDP) to identifying new sites for business use and expansion and the delivery of the LDP to target investment that opens up those sites to business.

**Figure 14: Postcode areas that will benefit from the Cairngorms Community Broadband project (Source: Community Broadband Scotland)**



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## Rural development delivery framework

Targets		Indicators
To deliver 200 new affordable houses during the Plan period		Number of affordable housing completions 2017-2022
To increase the number of community enterprises reinvesting surplus profit into community projects		Number of community enterprises reinvesting surplus profit into community projects – baseline of 4 in 2017
To maintain or improve business perceptions of the National Park's influence on customer attraction and operations/profitability		Influence of the Cairngorms National Park as reported through Cairngorms Business Barometer
To achieve more than 30% uptake of high speed broadband in the Cairngorms Community Broadband project		% of eligible properties subscribing to high speed broadband services under Cairngorms Community Broadband project
Delivery partnerships		
Business Support Group	Cairngorms Economic Forum	Cairngorms Local Action Group
Cairngorms Tourism Partnership	Community Planning Partnerships	Digital Cairngorms Steering Group
Highland Community Rail Partnership		
Delivery organisations		
Association of Cairngorms Communities	Community Broadband Scotland and Cairngorms Community Broadband	Cairngorms Business Partnership
Community Development Organisations and Community Development Officers	Federation of Small Businesses	Higher and Further Education providers
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Local Authorities	Rural Housing Enablers, Registered Social Landlords and Housing Associations
Scottish Council for Development and Industry	Scottish Enterprise	Scottish Futures Trust
Scottish Land and Estates	Skills Development Scotland	Transport Scotland
VisitScotland		
Key documents		
Cairngorms Economic Strategy		Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan and Action Programme
LEADER Local Development Strategy		Local Authority Housing Strategies

## Rural development policy framework

**Long-term outcome: A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities**

### **Policy 3.1**

Grow the economy of the Cairngorms National Park by strengthening existing business sectors, supporting business start-ups and diversification, and increasing the number of workers employed in the Park through:

- a) maintaining the population of the National Park and maintaining or growing the proportion of the working age population;
- b) supporting the diversification of existing land based businesses;
- c) encouraging growth of business sectors that draw on the special qualities of the Park such as sustainable tourism and food and drink;
- d) broadening the economic base of the Park into sectors such as creative industries, renewable energy, and making stronger links with higher and further education;
- e) increased provision for business land where there is an identified need and demand; and to support the use of land for small business, particularly within settlements;
- f) slowing outward migration of young people; to encourage their return; and the inward migration of workers to the Park to meet business and community needs;
- g) provision of a housing land supply that supports migration of young people and workers to the Park and maintains vibrant communities;
- h) reducing the proportion of vacant and second homes to support community vibrancy by ensuring that new housing development best meets local needs;
- i) maximising the proportion of new housing development that is affordable in perpetuity.

### **Policy 3.2**

Enable sustainable patterns of settlement development, infrastructure and communications by:

- a) consolidating the role of the strategic settlements identified in the current and future Local Development Plans as the most sustainable places for future growth and the focus for housing land supply while maintaining the integrity of designated sites;
- b) providing any additional flexibility in future land supply for housing at small sites around a wider range of settlements;
- c) supporting sensitively designed improvements to the A9 and other trunk roads and main railway line as an integral part of enhancing the connectivity of the Highlands;
- d) planning and improving integrated and sustainable local transport networks that allow for safe travel off-road and link with public transport;
- e) planning and supporting improvements to the information technology network;
- f) planning and supporting improvements to the mobile communications network that improve access to new generation technology and minimise the need for visually intrusive infrastructure.

**Policy 3.3**

Support development of a low carbon economy, with a particular focus on:

- a) increasing renewable energy generation, especially biomass and hydro, that is compatible with conserving the special qualities of the National Park and maintaining the integrity of designated sites. Large-scale wind turbines are not compatible with the landscape character or special landscape qualities of the National Park. They are considered inappropriate within the National Park or where outside the Park they significantly adversely affect its landscape character or special landscape qualities;
- b) supporting businesses and communities to use less energy, reduce emissions, improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings, generate low impact renewable energy, reduce, reuse and recycle resources, and plan for a changing climate;
- c) maximising the benefits to communities through direct use of locally generated energy or, where sold to the grid, reinvesting income to support community development;
- d) promoting high standards of sustainable design and efficient use of energy and materials in construction.

**Policy 3.4**

Support and build the capacity of communities to deliver their aspirations, with a particular focus on:

- a) supporting communities to plan for their own futures, develop and implement projects, engage the support of partners and share good practice;
- b) supporting innovative approaches to providing affordable housing to meet local needs;
- c) aligning community planning processes to simplify support to communities;
- d) engaging communities effectively in the long-term management of the National Park and in projects or programmes that affect them.

**Policy 3.5**

Enhance the design and sense of place in new development and existing settlements, in particular:

- a) enabling new development which contributes positively to the sense of place;
- b) promoting a high standard of sustainable design, energy efficiency, sustainably sourced materials and construction in new development;
- c) supporting the retention and enhancement of local character;
- d) facilitating the rehabilitation of redundant rural buildings and recycling of resources;
- e) ensuring road upgrades and improvements respond to local landscape character;
- f) promoting active travel and public transport provision and reducing the reliance on private motor vehicles.

## Capital investment priorities

A planned approach to capital investment in the National Park is critical to co-ordinating efforts across the public and private sector. There are a number of projects that private and third sector partners expect to invest in over the coming five years which will make a significant contribution to the National Park. These include:

- further development at Macdonald Aviemore Resort;
- completion of the major refurbishment of the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar;
- delivery of key housing sites identified in the Local Development Plan;
- improvements to Highland mainline railway stations;
- Strathspey Steam Railway extension to Grantown-on-Spey;
- enhancing facilities at Cairngorm Mountain;
- Highland Wildlife Park enhancements.

Public sector investment in the public infrastructure is also key to maintaining the high quality of place that underpins the visitor economy and community development. Priorities over the coming five years include:

- enhancement of visitor facilities at Glenmore;
- completion of Speyside Way and Deeside Way extensions;
- active travel improvements in Aviemore;
- Aviemore hospital;
- A9 dualling – especially ensuring that the investment benefits local communities and visitors;
- Highland Folk Museum enhancements;
- Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership;
- The Mountains and The People project;
- restoration of degraded peatland through the Peatland ACTION Project.

## Delivery mechanisms

There are well-established partnerships and delivery mechanisms in the National Park. The National Park Partnership brings together all organisations with a responsibility for delivery across the public, private and voluntary sectors, with a smaller number of these forming a Delivery Group to co-ordinate overall delivery. Other specific delivery partnerships include:

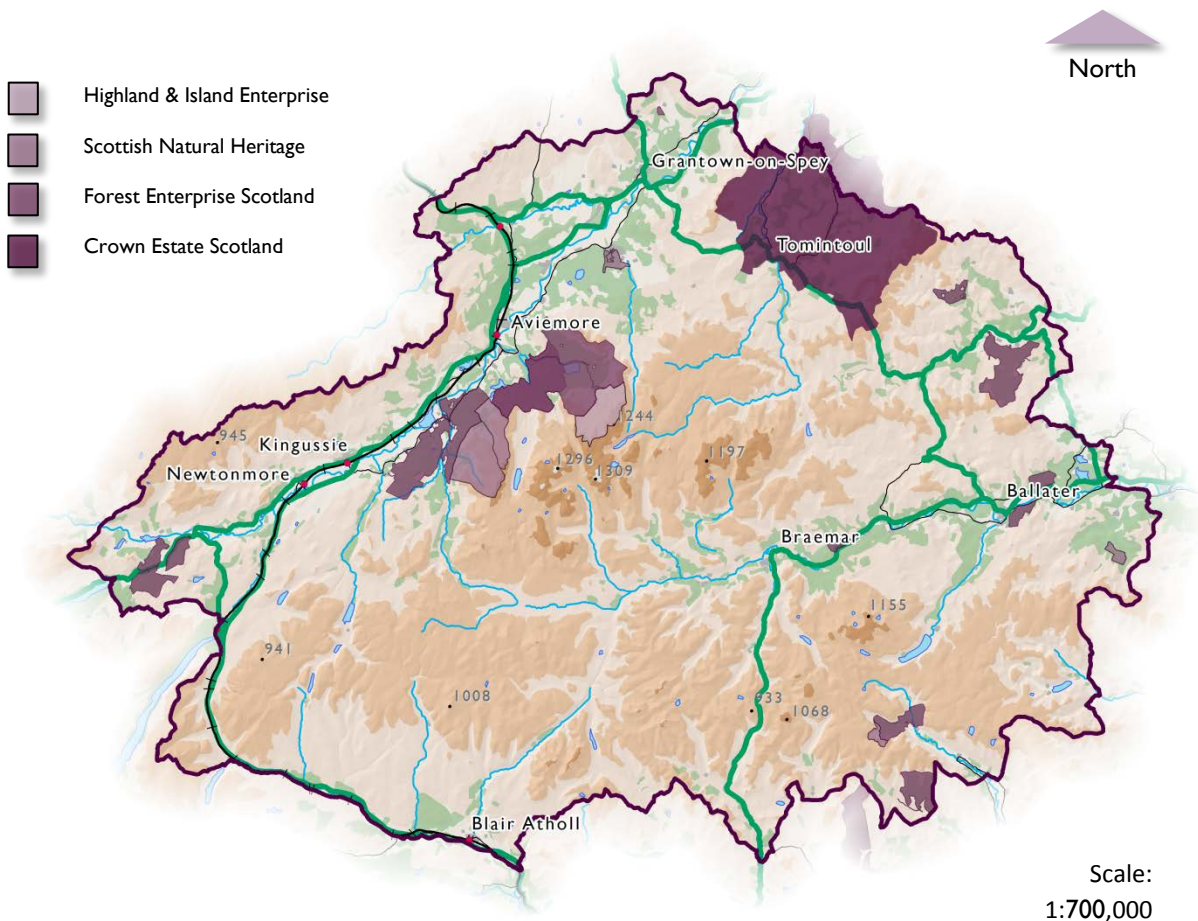
- Cairngorms Nature;
- Catchment Partnerships;
- Active Cairngorms Partnership;
- Cairngorm & Glenmore Partnership;
- Cairngorms Tourism Partnership;
- Cairngorms Economic Forum;
- Association of Cairngorms Communities;
- Cairngorms Local Action Group (LEADER).



## Role of publicly owned land

Land owned by Scottish Ministers and public bodies in the National Park provides the opportunity for leadership and direct delivery of the priorities in the Partnership Plan. For example, land managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage is already helping deliver the conservation and visitor experience priorities. At Cairngorm and Glenmore, the Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Forest Enterprise Scotland are collaborating with other partners to take a co-ordinated approach to making the most of the publicly owned land here for conservation, visitor experience and economic development. The future arrangements for the Glenlivet Estate will be determined through the new Crown Estate Scotland body. Land owned by other public bodies in and around communities has potential to help meet local housing and community development needs.

**Figure 15: Publicly owned land within the Cairngorms National Park**



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## **Research Strategy**

The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2012 -2017 prompted development of a National Park Research Strategy which led to increasing collaboration through a network of researchers working in the Cairngorms. We will be updating the research strategy to reflect the research priorities for the next five year period. The strategy will continue to focus on connecting research and the management needs of the Park through:

- connecting researchers with land managers, businesses, communities and policy makers;
- developing an information hub for research in the Cairngorms;
- delivering a knowledge exchange programme;
- supporting delivery of the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme.

## **Monitoring delivery**

Progress in delivering the Partnership Plan will be monitored through the production of an annual monitoring report, which will outline delivery against the targets and indicators in the plan. A partnership meeting of key organisations will also be held each year to co-ordinate delivery actions, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board will receive six monthly progress updates.