

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: Proposed Extension to the Speyside Way

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Purpose:

- To update the Board on progress made by the Speyside Way Development Officer with identifying possible options for extending the Long Distance Route from Aviemore to Newtonmore;
- to advise the Board on the outcome of an appraisal of options identified by the Development Officer;
- to seek Board approval for consulting landowners, communities, user groups and all other interested parties over a single preferred option;
- to seek Board approval for the Cairngorms National Park Authority, on behalf of the partners of the Speyside Way Management Group, to lead the public consultation; and
- to note the further work that would be required before a proposal to extend the Speyside Way could be submitted to Ministers and implemented.

Recommendations:

- 1. that the Board approves that a consultation exercise should now take place over a preferred route for the Speyside Way extension, and**
- 2. that the Board approves that CNPA, on behalf of the partners of the Speyside Way Management Group, leads the consultation on the preferred route.**

Executive Summary:

There has been interest locally in extending the Speyside Way LDR for some time. A Development Officer was employed over the summer to investigate, in consultation with landowners and local community interests, possible options on the ground for extending the route.

All of the options identified in the Development Officer's report have been evaluated by the Speyside Way Management Group against a set of environmental, economic and social criteria, and a preferred route has been identified.

Board members are being asked to support a recommendation that the Cairngorms National Park Authority, on behalf of the partners of the Speyside Way Management Group, consults over a preferred route to gauge the level of support for this.

Proposed Extension to the Speyside Way

Background

1. There has been considerable public interest in extending the Speyside Way Long Distance Route (LDR)¹ from its current terminus in Aviemore to Newtonmore, and this was the focus of a CNPA Board paper in November 2003. At that time, the Board was asked to approve a joint approach, through working with the managing partners² of the LDR and by deploying a Development Officer on a time-limited contract to investigate possible options for extending the route.
2. Scottish Natural Heritage has discretionary powers under the provisions of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, to present formal proposals on LDRs to Ministers and this would include any proposed extension to the Speyside Way LDR. A number of stages need to be completed before a proposal can be submitted to Ministers and amongst these a key factor is the achievement of consensus over a proposed route. The main objective of the Development Officer therefore was to familiarise with the history of this planned extension and to identify a number of possible route options in consultation with landowners and land managers. Consultation with local community, user groups and other interests also formed a key part of the job.

Development Officer's Report

3. The Development Officer, Alastair Macleod, was employed by CNPA to carry out an initial investigation which commenced in April 2004. During the four month contract, the Development Officer contacted 18 landowners and occupiers, or their representatives, mostly through personal contact which allowed face-to-face meetings. The Development Officer also attended meetings of the respective Community Councils, Community Associations and Development Trusts, and met with a wide range of interests including local footpath groups, user-groups and other interested parties.
4. A summary of the Development Officer's findings is attached for information as Annex 1. This provides a brief introduction to the project, describes the methodology and lists the contacts made and the route options investigated. It should be noted that between Aviemore and Kincaig/Feshiebridge, essentially there are two broad options for the route, one on the east side of the River Spey and one on the west side. Within these two broad options, there are a number of alternative possible routes. From Kincaig/Feshiebridge southwards, there are fewer options, so the picture is less complicated. A total of 15 route options were investigated and these are illustrated on Map 1.

¹ The Speyside Way was initially designated under the provisions of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 by the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1979. It originally ran between Spey Bay and Ballindalloch and was subsequently extended in April 2000 as far south as Aviemore.

² The Speyside Way LDR is governed by a *Minute of Agreement* between the Highland Council and Moray Council, which confers responsibility for managing the route upon Moray Council. The Minute of Agreement also establishes the Speyside Way Management Group, which is composed of representatives of the Moray and Highland Councils, Scottish Natural Heritage, MBSE and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, under the Chairmanship of the Moray Council. The LDR is 84 km long and currently has 34 km (40% of its length) within the Cairngorms National Park.

Analysis of Route Options

5. With such a range of potential options, it became clear to the Speyside Way Management Group that before any further work was done on detailed negotiations with landowners and land managers, it would be sensible to sound out landowners, local communities and user and interest groups over a preferred route. If agreement could be reached over a route in principle, then the next stage would be to go back to landowners to discuss the feasibility of implementation. It also became clear that with such a wide range of options identified by the Development Officer, it would greatly assist the process if the choice was narrowed down to a single preferred option.
6. The Speyside Way Management Group therefore evaluated the route options through a process of scoring each option against a set of criteria. A number of key determining factors were discussed and it was agreed that any preferred option should seek to provide a high quality recreational experience while optimising the social and economic benefits (i.e. preference towards a route which went through or close to settlements), and should minimise interference with existing land management regimes and areas of environmental sensitivity. It was also agreed that tarred roads should be avoided where possible. A set of criteria was therefore developed against which the various options were scored, with marks awarded from 0 to 5. A score of 5 indicated that the route option in question was fully compliant with any given criterion; a score of 0 indicated that the route option in question was unacceptable and therefore should be dropped from further consideration. An example of this might be where there were significant health and safety issues or where there was an unacceptable risk of flooding or erosion. The criteria for evaluation of route options are as follows:
 - *Quality of the route and visitor experience* (i.e. the inherent quality of the route)
 - *Natural heritage sensitivity* (including designated natural heritage sites and the presence of species that are sensitive to disturbance)
 - *Potential social & economic benefits* (for example, where the route goes near settlements, camp-sites, hotels, B&Bs, etc.)
 - *Scope for multi-use* (e.g. where the route is already suitable, or could be upgraded relatively easily, or could be built for multi-use)
 - *Capital expenditure required* (includes path building and accommodation works)
 - *Land management* (ideally the LDR should not compromise the day to day management of the land through which it passes)
 - *Links to local community path networks* (good links to existing community path networks and community involvement)
 - *Tarred roads* (tarred roads with motor traffic scored lowest, tarred routes such as the Sustrans route between Kingussie and Newtonmore were considered to be acceptable but not ideal)

Preferred Route

7. Using the above criteria and scoring system, combined with the local and specialist knowledge available through the Management Group, it has been possible to identify an overall preferred route (see Annex 2). From the north, the route leaves Aviemore on the west side of the A9 trunk road, skirting Craigellachie and heading for the Burma Road.

The route goes behind Alltnacriche and follows what has been termed the 'upland edge', an area of open moorland and birch woodland with views across Loch Alvie and the Strath. The route goes under the A9 at the Allt an Fhearna and across farmland to Dalraddy Caravan Park. From there, it picks up the Badenoch Way to Kincaig and then diverges via Invereshie to Feshiebridge. Thereafter, the route follows Forestry Commission tracks to Uath Lochans and on to Insh where the Badenoch Way is rejoined. From Invertromie, it is envisaged that the route would follow farm fields to Ruthven Farmhouse where it joins the B970 for a relatively short section into Kingussie. The last lap of the journey would be via the existing Sustrans route which links Kingussie with Newtonmore.

Proposed Consultation on Preferred Route

8. The Speyside Way Management Group has reached the view that this option should form the basis of a consultation exercise involving all those who were contacted by the Development Officer, and any other interested party. This would include landowners and land managers, tenant farmers, Community Councils and Community Associations, Development Trusts, local footpath groups, user groups and other interested parties. The consultation would aim to gauge the level of public support for both the rational that was used to identify a preferred route, and the line of the preferred route itself.
9. If there is sufficient support for the preferred route, then this would trigger the start of detailed negotiations with landowners and land managers. This approach does not preclude any other suggestions that individuals or organisations may have for the proposed extension.
10. The consultation is planned to run for twelve weeks from the end of October 2004 to the end of January 2005. The Speyside Way Management Group has recommended that the CNPA should lead the consultation given its forthcoming role as 'access authority' under Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, including responsibility for implementation of any approved route. The costs associated with conducting this consultation will be staff time, plus administrative costs including the costs of colour-copying route maps. Whilst it is proposed that the CNPA will lead on the consultation, its partners within the Management Group, and particularly SNH, are committed to giving practical and, if necessary, financial support as appropriate.

Landowner and Land Managers' Perspective

11. One of the key objectives of the Development Officer's work was to meet with individual landowners, tenant farmers and land managers, to discuss route options and to gauge their initial reaction to the possibility of the LDR crossing their land. As is reflected in the Development Officer's report, reaction to the proposals varied greatly. However, it would be fair to say that in the majority of cases, landowners and land managers were receptive to further dialogue about the possibility of a route, but raised a number of concerns which would need to be addressed before they would consider entering into any agreement over a specified route. The sorts of issues or concerns raised by landowners generally related to the integration of visitor management with current land management practices, but also included queries about works to accommodate the route, and maintenance of the route

itself. Landowners and land managers will form a key part of the consultation over the preferred route.

Next Steps

12. The objective of the public consultation is to gauge the level of support from a wide range of interests for the preferred route. The Speyside Way Management Group will review the responses to the consultation and provide interested parties with feedback. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, it should be possible to commence negotiations with landowners and land managers in terms of the provision of a route. The line of the route, including any new build, or up-grading of paths and any accommodation works and other infrastructure such as waymarking and signage, would need to be costed and a funding package put together.
13. Once a route has been agreed with landowners, tenants and interested parties, and both the costs of implementation and a funding package identified, a firm proposal for the Speyside Way extension would need to be ratified by the partners of the Management Group including the CNPA. A formal submission would then be made by Scottish Natural Heritage to the Scottish Executive to extend the Speyside Way. A further paper will be presented to the CNPA Board before final decisions are taken.

Recommendation

14. The CNPA Board is asked to approve that a consultation exercise should now take place over a preferred route for the Speyside Way extension.
15. The Board is also asked to approve that CNPA, on behalf of the partners of the Speyside Way Management Group, leads the consultation on the preferred route.

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