
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Core Path Plan monitoring

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Purpose The purpose of this paper is to advise the Forum of the steps taken to develop an assessment methodology for the core paths network.

Advice Sought

- Is the proposed methodology sufficient in meeting the aim as set out in Annex I?
- Is the proposed timetable for assessing the network appropriate?

Background

1. Now that the Core Paths network has been approved, it is necessary to consider how to monitor the condition of the core paths network. Whilst there is no statutory requirement to do so, a monitoring system will be useful for several purposes as set out in Annex I.
2. The Delivery Team for Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access agreed at their meeting in April 2008 that the concept of identifying and assessing paths that were in 'favourable condition' would be a suitable indicator of progress against two of the Park Plan Outcomes. These were:
 - *A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors; and*
 - *There will be a more extensive, high quality, well maintained and clearly promoted path network so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors and move around the Park in a way that minimises reliance on motor vehicles.*
3. Advice was sought from the LOAF in August 2008 on the draft criteria for assessing if a path was in "favourable condition" and in September 2008 the CNPA held a workshop with a variety of delegates to help take the work forwards. In summary, the key issues raised were:
 - The need to be clear about the purpose of the exercise;
 - Take care not to develop a system that required significant time, effort and resources to manage;
 - Concerns that a standard approach might lead towards a standardisation of the physical character of paths which would be undesirable;
 - The need to develop a system that could make use of information about paths that are principally managed by others;
 - Concerns over the term "favourable condition; and

- A strong preference for any assessment exercise to be kept as simple as possible and related only to the requirements highlighted in para. 1.

Development of the Methodology

4. After reviewing the information available from the above processes, CNPA consulted with the Delivery Team and proceeded to trial two approaches. The first approach was a desk-based exercise whereby Outdoor Access staff pulled together professional and personal knowledge from a range of partners to assess the condition of each core path. The second approach was a site-based exercise whereby field data was collected on a selected few built features, also providing an overall assessment of the core path. It was agreed the concept should be re-named to record paths that are “fit for purpose.”
5. Both desk and site-based approaches were piloted within the two Action Areas of the Outdoor Access Strategy: Upper Deeside and Lower Badenoch and Strathspey. Due to time constraints it was decided that the site based approach would be trialled on a limited number of paths. The ground-truthing element provided a useful control in determining the quality of information derived from the desk-based exercise.
6. Following the trial it was concluded that, for the purposes of monitoring at the scale of the core path network the data gathered from the desk-based exercise was sufficient, provided that staff could draw on the knowledge and experience of path mangers and others in making their assessment. The trial also demonstrated that, particularly in terms of staff time and resources, the desk-based assessment was much more cost effective. Issues were highlighted about accuracy and consistency of assessment but all of these could all be addressed through development of a robust methodology, training and careful supervision.
7. On this basis the methodology has been developed further as set out in Annex 1.

The Forum’s advice is sought on whether the proposed methodology is sufficient in meeting the aim as set out in Annex 1?

8. Once the Forum has provided advice the next steps are to seek final approval from CNPA Management Team and thereafter assess the outstanding network and revisit the pilot areas, if necessary.

Timescale for assessment of the network

9. A complete assessment of the network will be carried out for the first time by 1st April 2010 and updated annually thereafter. In addition, periodic updates will take place when path projects are completed. It is proposed that an annual report will update the Forum on progress.

Is the proposed timetable for assessing the network appropriate?

Further work required

10. This approach to monitoring of Core Paths is oriented towards their physical characteristics. It would also be appropriate to measure the effectiveness of the Core

Paths network in terms of increasing people's level of outdoor activity and active travel choices. Certainly there are appropriate indicators in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, for example:

- Increase the proportion of adults making one or more visits to the outdoors each week
- Increase the proportion of journeys made to work using public or active transport

11. Over the next year we will review, in conjunction with partners, where and how we are collecting information about use of paths and the outdoors (through, for example, considering the deployment of people counters and what happens to the data generated). We will then present proposals to LOAF and the Delivery Team that will help us report to the Government and other partners.

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