Annex 1: Methodology for the assessment of Core Paths that are "Fit for purpose"

1. Rationale and Aims

The assessment of the degree to which core paths are easy to use by members of the public is an important component of the planned and pro-active management of the National Park's new core paths network. An assessment process has been developed which uses the knowledge and experience of both CNPA staff and other to gather basic data on the condition of the paths in the network. It uses a standard methodology so that progress can be tracked over time. This paper sets out the methodology which defines how the work will be undertaken.

The aim of the assessment process is to provide an overall assessment of the degree to which core paths in the network are "Fit for purpose" so that we can:

a. **Measure progress towards the National Park Plan outcomes – the target is to increasing the proportion of paths in the network that are "Fit for purpose" to 90% by 2012;**
b. **Report to the CNPA Board, Local Outdoor Access Forum and interested members of the public; and**
c. **Plan where further work is required to improve the core paths network for members of the public.**

2. What will we do with the information?

The information provided will enable CNPA to monitor progress towards improving the overall proportion of core paths that are easy to use by a wide range of people. The information will support the justification for expenditure as well as demonstrate to the CNPA Board, Delivery Team and Local Outdoor Access Forum that improvements to the network are contributing to the relevant National Park Plan outcomes:

- *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.*

Periodic reports will be compiled and made publicly available. The findings of the assessment will be presented in both statistical and map-based formats.

3. Overview of methodology

The "fit for purpose" assessment is a desk-based exercise to capture basic information to compare against three key tests for the core paths:

a) **Barriers and obstructions** – the path should be the least restrictive possible

b) **Path surface condition** – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users
c) **Directional paths signs** – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.

These key tests are used to assess whether or not the path is "Fit for purpose". If any path fails to meet the appropriate criteria for one of the key tests the paths will be judged not to be "Fit for Purpose". The process is explained in more detail in Section 4.

The assessment will be carried out by CNPA Outdoor Access staff and one member of the Team will coordinate this work to ensure consistency in data capture and use.

The "fit for purpose" assessment form (**Appendix A**) is the basis of the assessment exercise. Consistency and accuracy is essential, as is explaining the rationale behind the assessment, as this methodology will be repeated periodically over a period spanning several years.

4. Filling out the assessment form

The **basic information** on the form is the Action Area Code (e.g. LBS) and path number (up to 3 digits and a letter suffix if the path has been split) to identify each of the individual paths in the network. The date of the assessment and the name of the assessor should be recorded.

The **route name and description** is a short paragraph of less than 200 characters giving the route name, or start and end point and, if possible, an indication of the path's predominant use. If the path is over 10km in length it will be spilt, for the sake of assessment, into two or more sections so that the individual paths in the network are broadly comparable.

The **predominant surface description** records the path surface expressed as a percentage of the overall length of the path. On the form the terms "**path**" is used to define a route not wide enough for a vehicle. The term "**track**" is used for a path wide enough for a vehicle. Other types may be recorded in the "**other**" box such as formal cycle path. The surveyor has the opportunities to record any other comments relevant to the route description.

Type of surface is recorded as an overall percentage of the whole route with **dust** being an unbound but constructed path. **Sealed** is a path with bitumen and **natural** is for grassy routes or routes that may have a firm sub-base but with an organic layer covering the path. The survey can record in the "other" box if the surface is something different and there is a comments box to record pertinent information.

Overall gradients are recorded as the average of all the gradients and described as steep (significant effort to climb), moderate (some effort to climb) and easy (little to no effort to climb).

The **Users identified are** recorded (including information from path counters if available), and a comment should be made about potential users following improvements.

The three Key Tests: The surveyor assigned to assess the route should seek the views of colleagues and path managers. Each path will be assessed against the three key tests as set out in **Table 1** (for paths on land) and **Table 2** (for the main access points associated with the River Spey). For each key test there are several criteria which help to indicate whether the path should pass or fail. It is the surveyor's responsibility to make an assessment of each test based on identified users and potential users over the whole length of the path being assessed.

a) **Barriers and obstructions – the path should be the least restrictive possible.** On the survey form this test has been broken down into three questions prompting the surveyor to record gates, steps and bridges. The number and type of gates should be recorded. The total number of flights of steps should be recorded (rather than actual number of steps) along with comments on their condition or style of construction. Bridges should be recorded as the number of bridges under 1metre wide and the number over 1 metre wide and any comments on condition or style of construction.

b) **Path surface condition – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users.** For this test the survey form prompts the surveyor by asking three questions about the suitability of over the whole of the path section being assessed.

c) **Directional paths signs – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.** The prompts for this test are seeking to establish if signage and waymarking is present, is it sufficient for the location and does it meet current policy as set out in Design Guidance for Directional Path Signs, Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2009 (page 19). The presence of good quality signage of the wrong design style should be enough to pass the test but the signs should be changed to the approved design style once they are due for replacement.

The initial assessment will be updated during the course of the year when path development or signage projects are completed. A review of the assessment will be carried on an annual basis focusing first on those paths assessed internally without external advice then those not updated in the last 9 months.

Table 1: Criteria for each of the three key tests which comprise the "Fit for Purpose" assessment (paths on land)

Key test	Likely reasons for passing	Likely reasons for failing
a) **Barriers and obstructions** – the path should be the least restrictive possible	• No barriers • Location of any barriers does not preclude use of most of the path • Type of barrier is unlikely to preclude most likely use • Location of route means users' expectations are to encounter some barriers	• Barriers are obstructing many users • Multiple barriers along the route • Proximity to settlements means greater expectation that route is barrier free (subject to the nature of the route) • Poor design of gates and stiles precludes expected use
b) **Path surface condition** – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users	• Surface robust for expected use (e.g. free draining) • Comfortable for most users • Appropriate width for expected use and location	• Wet and muddy sections of route are likely to preclude expected users • Surface material is excluding some users (e.g. unconsolidated ballast on old railway line which makes walking difficult) • Too narrow for expected use (e.g. pushchairs and cyclists)
c) **Directional paths signs** – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.	• Signage is in line with the National Park Policy • Signage is appropriate to location and likely users • Signage is legible and in good condition	• Signage is inadequate, in poor condition or absent • Significant junctions lack appropriate signage • Proliferation or location of signs causes confusion or spoils user experience

Table 2: Criteria for each of the three key tests which comprise the "Fit for Purpose" assessment (for the main access points associated with the River Spey)

Key test	Likely reasons for passing	Likely reasons for failing
Barriers and obstructions – the path should be the least restrictive possible	• No barriers or obstructions for access with boats • Appropriate design of gates and stiles for access with boats	• Barriers or obstructions to boat users
Path surface condition – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users	• Surface robust for expected use	• Wet and muddy sections and/or bank erosion due to use of boats
Directional paths signs – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.	• Signage is in line with the National Park Policy • Signage and associated information provides information on responsible behaviour and likely conditions to be encountered on next section of the River	• Signage is inadequate, in poor condition or absent • Lack of, or inadequate, signage and associated information

5. Overall assessment of "Fit for purpose"

The overall assessment is based on the assessment against each key test on the day of the survey. A failure for any one of the three key tests will mean that the path is not "fit for purpose". For the Spey the test has been modified to reflect that it only applies to the access and egress points. However, failure in any of the three tests will still result in the path not being fit for purpose.

6. Use of Maps during the assessment

Accompanying each survey from will be an A4 map, at an appropriate scale, highlighting the path. The officer assessing the path are should annotate this map as they see fit and refer to it in the additional information column.

7. Collection and storage of data

General: It is the duty of the CNPA lead officer to ensure that appropriate training is given, that standards are maintained and that all survey records are captured and stored safely.

GIS: In the GIS dataset for the Core Paths Plan four new columns will be added to the attribute table where the results from each key tests and the overall "fit for purpose" assessment will be imputed. This will allow interrogation of the dataset to illustrate in a map form those paths which fail what test.

Filing: Each survey form will be filed under each Action Area.

Cairngorms National Park Authority
January 2010

Appendix A: The "Fit for purpose" Assessment Form

Path Ref.	**Date**					**Assessor**
Route name and general description/comments						**Location**
Predominant surface description %	Path	Track	Other	Comments		
Type %	Dust	Sealed	Natural	Other	Comments	
Overall gradients	Steep (significant effort to climb)			Moderate (some effort to climb)		Easy (little to no effort)
Users identified						

Key Test							**Pass/fail**	**Additional Information**
a) **Barriers and obstructions** – the path should be the least restrictive possible	**No. gates/ stiles?**	KG	PG	LG	Stile	Other		
	No. flights of step?		Comments					
	No. bridges?	<1m	>1m	Comments				
b) **Path surface condition** – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users	Comments							
c) **Directional paths signs** – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.	Comments							

Is the Path Fit for Purpose?	**Yes**	**No**
Brief summary (if appropriate) of the work that would be required to make the path Fit for Purpose		
Who was consulted?		