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## CAIRNGORMS VISIT Forum

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**Title: Update on Outdoor Access in the National Park**

**Prepared by: Murray Ferguson, Head of Visitor Services and Recreation**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Forum on the progress with development of management of Outdoor Access in the Cairngorms National Park. **Forum members are asked to note and comment on the progress that has been made to date and plans for future work.**

### **Background**

2. The Park Authority took on its new powers as access authority under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 on 9 February 2005. The Act gives a right of access to most land and water in Scotland as long as it is exercised responsibly. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which was prepared by SNH and has been approved by Parliament explains what responsible behaviour means for the public and for land managers. The Code is based on three key principles:
  - Respect the interests of other people
  - Care for the environment
  - take responsibility for you own actions
3. During 2004 the Board of the Park Authority identified that an Outdoor Access Strategy should be prepared for the Park as a way of integrating the work of the four local authorities, each of which had previously led on outdoor access in the area that is now covered by the Park. It was agreed that the Strategy would provide a good basis for the work that would have to be done on Core Paths Planning and also that the strategy would form an important building block for the National Park Plan.
4. Following a meeting with partners in June 2004 it was decided that the OAS should be developed using the Guide to Good Practice published in June 2004 by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Paths for All Partnership (see **Annex 1** for process). However, it was decided that it would not be beneficial to complete the strategy in advance of formation of the Local Outdoor Access Forum. Work commenced with consultants on the preparation of an Outdoor Access Audit as part of the first stages of Strategy preparation.
5. The Local Outdoor Access Forum has now been formed and for the first time on 31 March 2005 with second meeting planned for 7 June. The Forum has 21 members with knowledge, skills and experience from a range of backgrounds. Three broad stakeholders groups are involved (i.e. land managers, recreational users and community interests) and there are representatives of specific agencies involved in matters related to outdoor access (Forestry Commission, Visitscotland and Scottish

Natural Heritage) and the Park Authority Board. The Forum is tasked with advising CNPA on any matter to do with management of outdoor access.

6. A number of actions have been taken in recent months to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) including:
  - providing training courses for land management staff and ranger services
  - promoting SOAC through adverts and text in publications
  - commissioning displays for use at events
  - talks to specialist interested groups, including the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce.

### The Outdoor Access Audit

7. The term “outdoor access” includes all non-motorised outdoor travel by people of all ages and abilities, using networks of paths, open spaces and linkages in and around settlements and rural areas. Outdoor access is used as the basis of much of the recreational activity in the National Park. The Audit does not aim to summarise all recreational activity in the Park but instead focuses on the supply and demand for outdoor access on the basis of paths, tracks and quiet roads, rivers and areas of open water. Therefore the provision for walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and paddlers is specifically addressed, all bearing in mind the need to provide a range of opportunities for people of all abilities. Many other forms of recreation, not specifically covered by the Audit, will use this network of paths, tracks and access points to gain access to specific sites or areas (e.g. for rock-climbing, orienteering, etc).
8. Once finalised the Audit will include:
  - a. **Supply Audit** – providing a description of the supply or provision of outdoor access that is currently available within the Cairngorms National Park;
  - b. **Demand Audit** – drawing together available sources of information to describe existing patterns of outdoor access activity across the National Park, together with an assessment of changing demand (based on information about national and local trends) and potential demand (based on judgements about suppressed or latent demand, and the possibility that Park designation will itself change the pattern of demand for outdoor access within the area);
  - c. **Policy Audit** – summary and analysis of the existing policy framework within the National Park area and its implications for the future development of policies on outdoor access; and
  - d. **Resources Audit** – an overview of the funding and staff resources that have been utilised on outdoor access in the Cairngorms over the past few years and a short review of the principal sources of funding that may be applicable in the future.
7. The Park Authority had commissioned consultants to work on the Outdoor Access Audit. For a number of reasons progress with the Audit has been delayed and it has now been decided to take the work in-house and to complete a final draft by mid-July.

## The Outdoor Access Strategy

8. The completion of the Strategy will require input from a wide number of different stakeholders and also input from members of the Local Outdoor Access Forum and ViSIT Forum before it is considered by the Park Authority Board. It will be necessary to form a small Steering Group to guide the strategy to completion. Ensuring that this work is taken forwards will be an early priority task for Bob Grant who joins us as the new Senior Outdoor Access Officer on 28 June.
9. The draft timetable for completion of the Outdoor Access Strategy, subject to discussion with the Local Outdoor Access Forum indicates that it should be complete by early December.
10. The Park Authority has to prepare a Core Paths Plan by February 2008. While the priority is now to complete the Outdoor Access Strategy, it makes sense to start to consider how the Core Paths Planning work will be carried out. Plans are currently being made for a small number of pilot projects which aim:
  - a. To raise community awareness about the new outdoor access legislation, SOAC and the Core Paths Plan process and prepare the way for a community based approach to Core Paths Planning.
  - b. To gather information and advise the Park Authority on the views of the local communities, land managers, local people and visitors about the use made of paths in the area, and the possibilities for improvement in the future.
  - c. To advise the CNPA of the techniques used to achieve this and the lessons learned from using these techniques.

## Possible future development of Upper Deeside Access Trust

11. Many Forum members will be aware of the exemplary work on outdoor access that has been carried out in Deeside by the Upper Deeside Access Trust. Discussions are under way at officer level between the various funding agencies about the possible future development of the Trust when current funding runs out in 2006. The Trust has also recently commissioned consultants to examine possible future developments and the results are currently being considered by the Directors of the Trust.
12. One of the significant issues to be addressed by the Outdoor Access Strategy for the Park should be consideration of the role that UDAT or a similar Trust could play in the delivering the Strategy. At a recent meeting of the various funding agencies (including SNH, Aberdeenshire Council, Grampian Enterprise and CNPA) it was agreed, that in advance of the finalisation of the Outdoor Access Strategy for the National Park, the funders would be likely to look favourably on an application for interim funding for the Trust to cover the period 07/08. Murray Ferguson was charged with writing to the Trust to communicate this Trust immediately following the Forum meeting.

Murray Ferguson  
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[murrayferguson@ Cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:murrayferguson@ Cairngorms.co.uk)