

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Point of Entry Marker Project

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Purpose

To ask the Board to review the proposed installation of a permanent entry marker at the Pass of Drumochter in view of the commitment made by the Scottish Ministers to review the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park.

Recommendations

That the Board approve:

- a) **Postponing the installation of a permanent entry point marker on the A9 Trunk Road at Drumochter until the review of the Cairngorms National Park Boundary has been completed.**
- b) **Reallocate expenditure of £65,000 to contribute to the upgrading of the existing lay-by at Drumochter and installation of Park-wide visitor information; noting that this will result in an overall reduced expenditure of £45,000 on the project this financial year.**

Executive Summary

This paper discusses the implications of installing a permanent entry point marker at the Pass of Drumochter in the light of the recent commitment by Ministers to review the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park. Cost estimates for the upgrading of the existing lay-by at Drumochter are presented together with an appraisal of the merits of upgrading the lay-by. Approval is sought to postpone the installation of the marker and reallocate funds in this financial year toward the upgrading of the lay-by and the installation of Park-wide visitor information.

POINT OF ENTRY MARKER PROJECT – FOR DECISION

Background

1. The development of entry point markers for the National Park was identified as one of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's (CNPA) early priorities. The work was initially developed through the Gateways and Information Working Group that operated between November 2003 and May 2004. Since July 2004 the project has been the subject of seven Board papers that have provided information on progress and/or requested authority to proceed with the next stage of the project.
2. In the spring of 2005 permanent markers were installed at the five railway stations using the new brand image for the National Park. Interim metal signs were erected at ten of the busiest road entrances to the National Park.
3. In September 2005 the Board approved expenditure by the CNPA of £328,000 to implement Phase 1 of the project which comprised the installation of 21 permanent markers on non-trunk roads and long distance routes and the upgrade of associated lay-bys and car parks at Huntly's Cave (near Grantown) and Dinnit. The Board also approved in principle Phase 2 of the project which comprised the installation of permanent granite markers and associated works at four trunk road sites. The detailed approval of expenditure was to be subject to a further Board paper.
4. In June 2006 the Board were formally updated on progress, at which time all the contractors had been appointed and most sites agreed but no markers had been installed. Board members have also received a number of other updates on progress with the project as a matter of routine.
5. In December 2006 the Board approved expenditure of £289,000 to install the remaining four permanent granite markers at the trunk road entrances to the National Park. The Board also noted that proposals for the upgrading of the lay-by associated with the marker at Drumochter would be the subject of a future Board paper once agreement in principle and detailed cost estimates were obtained from Transport Scotland.
6. Work on the manufacture of the four remaining granite markers is nearing completion with installation scheduled for later this year.

Discussion: Permanent Boundary Markers

7. The issue of the placing of the Drumochter boundary marker, and the costs involved, was raised during the Stage 1 hearings and debate on the Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill (which fell in March 2007). Since then the Minister for Environment has indicated that a review of the boundary will take place:

'There is widespread support for the objectives of our national parks and, in the first few years since they were designated, both Scottish National Parks have achieved significant progress.'

Following on from the recent adoption of the two National Park Plans, I propose to initiate a review in the near future which will provide an opportunity to examine the operation of the Park Authorities as well as any questions about Park boundaries,' (20 June 2007)

8. It seems likely that any review of the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park will look again at the case for including areas of Eastern and Highland Perthshire. Any changes to include areas of Perthshire may result in Drumochter no longer being a point of entry to the National Park.
9. The cost of installing the granite boundary marker alone at Drumochter is estimated to be £75,000. A high proportion of these costs are for safety banking and associated landscaping. Our advisors consider that, should the boundary change, the marker could be re-located but this would be both costly (likely to be in excess of £75,000) and there would be some risk of damage to the marker.
10. It would seem imprudent at this stage to proceed with expenditure of this scale with a possibility that the work may be redundant within two to three years. The National Park boundary at Drumochter is currently marked by an interim metal sign that can remain in place until the outcome of the boundary review is known.

Discussion: Drumochter Lay-by

11. Transport Scotland has recently produced costs for upgrading the lay-by at Drumochter and is keen to progress the work. The estimated cost of works to the lay-by is £160,000 excluding VAT which can be recovered by Transport Scotland as the lead agency. These costs do not include the installation of the entry point marker or any Park wide information but are still significantly lower than the original outlines presented to the Board. The cost of installing interpretation and associated landscaping is estimated at up to £25,000.
12. Table 1 below presents the current funding package for the lay-by being discussed with partners.

Table 1: Potential Funding Partners for the Drumochter Lay-by

Funding Agency	Amount £
Transport Scotland	70,000
Transport Scotland 'inkind' design and project management	20,000
HIE Inverness & East Highland (HIEIEH)	20,000
Rees Jeffries Road Fund	10,000
CNPA	40,000
Total	160,000

13. None of this financial support is formally committed but an application for grant aid has been made to the Rees Jeeffries Road Fund with a decision due in September. The RJRF previously provided support for works at the lay-by on the A939 north of

Grantown-on-Spey and was delighted with the results so we are optimistic about this application. Discussions with both Transport Scotland and HIEIEH are advanced but we still require a formal commitment.

14. The Pass of Drumochter has significance beyond its recent National Park boundary designation. The pass forms the high point on the old Wade military road, superseded by the A9, the Highland railway line and the recently developed National Cycle Route 7. It also forms the boundary between Perthshire and Highland.
15. The landscape is dramatic with, on a fine day, impressive views of the close by hills the 'Sow of Atholl' and the 'Boar of Badenoch'. Stories associated with these hills form part of Highland folklore. The mass of drumlins visible on the lower ground at Drumochter are clear evidence of the work of glaciers that shaped this impressive pass.
16. Despite being run down the existing lay-by attracts visitors using it as a stopping off point for hill walking and others simply taking in the view. If Drumochter was merely a location in the National Park and not at the boundary the existing lay-by would still be considered a site worthy of environmental improvement.

Recommendation

17. **It is recommended that the Board:**
 - a) **Postpone the installation of a permanent entry point marker on the A9 Trunk Road at Drumochter until the review of the Cairngorms National Park Boundary has been completed.**
 - b) **Approve reallocating expenditure of £65,000 to contribute to the upgrading of the existing lay-by at Drumochter and installation of park wide visitor information; noting that this will result in an overall reduced expenditure of £45,000 on the project this financial year.**

Policy Context

18. The work at Drumochter will contribute toward the following outcome in The National Park Plan: *- everyone will know when they have arrived in the National Park and have a positive feeling about arriving in a special place.*

Delivering Sustainability

19. The decision to postpone the installation of a permanent marker at Drumochter is inherently more sustainable than installing it now with the possibility of having to move the marker in relatively short time.

Delivering A Park for All

20. The project is highly visible to a large number of people entering into the National Park. The upgrading of the lay-by at Drumochter will improve an unsightly feature

on the busiest entrance to the National Park and encourage people to stop and appreciate the scenery and obtain information about the National Park.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

21. The project remains within the overall cost estimates presented to the Board in September 2005 and December 2006. Postponing the installation of the permanent marker at Drumochter is considered to be financially prudent.

Implications

Financial Implications

22. Assuming that works on the lay-by can be completed by March 2008 the recommendation would reduce the CNPA commitment to Phase 2 by £45,000 this financial year. The current estimate of the total project costs (Phase 1 and Phase 2), including partner contributions, remains within the estimates presented to the Board of £1,250,000.
23. However, the commitment to install a permanent marker on A9 will be carried forward into future years.

Presentational Implications

24. The decision to postpone the installation of a permanent marker at Drumochter is likely to be considered prudent. It is unfortunate that this will leave the most popular entrance into the National Park temporarily without a high quality granite marker. However, this will be partly offset by the upgrading of the lay-by and the installation of visitor information which will contribute toward creating a high quality gateway at the pass.

Implications for Stakeholders

25. Communities and businesses close to Drumochter may have concerns that visitors are not receiving the same quality entrance experience as those entering the National Park at other locations. Again, the upgrade of the lay-by is likely to off set some of this concern.

Next Steps

26. We will seek to reach formal agreements with Transport Scotland and other partners over the upgrading of the lay-by and press for works to be completed this year. We will continue to update the Board on developments as part of the ongoing updates about the Point of Entry Project.

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27 July 2007

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