
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Speyside Way extension and funding

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Purpose: This paper is in 2 parts. The first provides the Forum with an update on progress to extend the Speyside Way from Aviemore to Newtonmore. The second explains the Park Authority's role in contributing to the funding of the Speyside Way.

Background

1. There has been a long held desire to extend the Speyside Way from its current southern terminus in Aviemore to Newtonmore. This desire was echoed by Scottish Executive Ministers when the route was previously extended from Ballindalloch to Aviemore. The power to approve an extension to an existing Long Distance Route rests with Scottish Ministers and it is the duty of Scottish Natural Heritage to consult with planning authorities through whose area the route passes, prior to submitting the documents to Scottish Ministers. To assist Scottish Natural Heritage with this process, CNPA agreed to lead the Speyside Way Management Group on much of the route feasibility work.
2. To take the route development forward a temporary Development Officer was appointed to explore the feasibility of a route. The Development Officer's report was the subject of a Board paper which indicated that a full public consultation exercise should be undertaken on a "preferred route." The line was selected by the Speyside Way Management Group having regard to the Development Officer's report.

Consultation

3. The public consultation exercise took place between 13th December 2004 and 25th March 2005. A total of 56 responses were received from land managers, individuals, community councils and associations, public bodies and tenants.
4. The consultation posed three questions:
 - Are you in favour of extending the Speyside Way?
 - Are you in favour of the rationale used to evaluate the route options?
 - Do you support the line of the preferred route?
5. There was overwhelming support for the principle of an extension with thirty-four positive responses and no negatives. Thirty respondents did not comment on the rationale although eight commended the approach taken. Half of the respondents, however, questioned elements of the preferred route. The vast majority of concerns being expressed over the line taken on the route between Aviemore and Dalraddy. The Speyside Way Management Group therefore re-appraised the preferred route in light of these comments and proposed an alternative line to the one consulted upon that tried to obviate some of the problems raised by respondents. The new "preferred route" was taken to the CNPA Board on 23 September. A map showing the preferred route can be found in Annex 1 to this document.

6. However, there still remains a number of outstanding objections to this line and whilst the Board approved the principle of the extension being taken forward to SNH and Ministers, they also requested that CNPA staff and colleagues on the Speyside a Management Group liaise with the relevant interest groups to find a solution to the outstanding issues.
7. A total of 9 further representations have been received as a consequence of the Board paper and publication of the consultation exercise. CNPA staff and Speyside Way Management Group colleagues are now in the process of arranging meetings or have met with parties that continue to have concerns. It is acknowledged that the outstanding issues are complex and cover privacy, commercial interest, security and nature conservation. These will take some time to work through and it may be that full resolution is not possible.
8. A report on progress towards resolution will be forwarded to CNPA Board members and the Local Access Forum.

Funding the Speyside Way

9. The Speyside Way has been funded to date by the two local authorities through whose ground the route passes (Moray and The Highland Council) with grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage. The duty to implement Long Distance Routes (LDR) arises from the Countryside Scotland Act 1967. With the passing of the Land Reform Act the Cairngorms National Park Authority has become an access authority and consequently, the funding responsibilities for the management of the route within the Park will now rest with the Authority
10. Strategic management of the Speyside Way is provided through the Speyside Way Management Group of which CNPA is a member. The other members are Moray Council, The Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise. The Management Group agree the Development and Management Programme which contains the aims, objectives and work programme for a rolling three year period. The Development and Management Programme is implemented by the Speyside Way Manager and staff who are employed by Moray Council. To clarify the respective roles of the funding bodies and to ensure that there is a common understanding on all issues pertaining to the funding and management of the route, a Minute of Agreement has been drawn up between the 3 managing authorities. The finalised Minute of Agreement will provide the necessary safeguards to ensure that Park investment is targeted appropriately and all the maintenance commitments are fully documented and agreed.
11. Subject to satisfactory conclusions to the discussions on the Minute of Agreement the financial cost to the Park Authority for the 05/06 financial year will be £57,000. This has been calculated as a pro rata share of the total costs of managing the route based on total mileage within each authority's boundary. The on-going costs for managing the route in future years will be similar, subject to inflation, although there is likely to be a stepped increase if and when Scottish Ministers approve the proposed extension of the LDR to Newtonmore. The current estimate for the management and maintenance of the extension is £58,000. If the extension is approved, then the total annual contribution towards the management of the route will be in the order of £115,000.
12. To provide a degree of comfort to all signatories within the Minute of Agreement, there will be a clause allowing any or all of the signatories to terminate the agreement giving one year's notice.

Opportunities for land manager involvement

13. Reform within agricultural support mechanisms offers up the future possibility of some sections of the route being maintained by farmers through Land Management Contracts. The new scheme offers the possibility of maintenance being undertaken by farmers who will be able to attract a payment of £2.75 per linear metre. The contracts would run for an initial period of five years and would enable land managers to benefit financially from routes that pass through their ground.
14. At this stage, the protocols for liaison between access authorities and the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) are still being developed. These Contracts do potentially offer up an effective means of maintenance which both provide revenue to farmers and reduce the costs of maintenance to the access authorities. CNPA staff will continue to press the Executive and SNH to further develop the possibility of Land Management Contracts being used on Long Distance Routes (and on other paths).

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