

CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Future Management of the Speyside Way

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Purpose This paper highlights the outputs of a review of the management arrangements for the Speyside Way and seeks guidance that will assist in shaping the future management of the route.

Advice Sought

The Forum:

- a) Notes the conclusions arising from the review commissioned by CNPA of the current management arrangements; and
- b) Advises staff on any further matters that should be considered in shaping future management to the route.

Background to Speyside Way Management Arrangements

1. The Speyside Way is one of four official Long Distance Routes in Scotland. The costs of managing and maintaining this route is shared between the three Access Authorities: Moray Council, Highland Council and CNPA. In summary, CNPA currently contributes 100% of the shared cost of the route within the National Park (through a Minute of Agreement) whereby Moray Council takes the lead role in route management on behalf of all relevant parties. The CNPA's contribution to the overall costs of managing the route is around £70,000 per annum.
2. Two reviews of the route are either underway or have been completed. Firstly, in approving the funding for the current year the Cairngorms National Park Board requested that a review be undertaken of the current management arrangements for the section of the route within the National Park, which would be used to inform decision making in future years. At that meeting, the Board also noted that changes were likely to be required (particularly in light of the proposed extension) and a number of principles that should be taken into account in the review of the Development and Management Plan. CNPA commissioned consultants (P4 Projects) to undertake the review on its behalf. The key conclusions are summarised at **Annex I**.
3. Secondly, late in 2008 the partner organisations involved in the management of the route decided that a Best Value Review should be undertaken as it was clear that, due to a number of factors (not least budget constraints), some significant changes were likely to be required. This review of the whole route is being undertaken in-

house, led by Moray Council. CNPA staff are participating in the Best Value Review Group and have shared the results of the CNPA-commissioned study.

4. A range of options is currently being evaluated by the CNPA Review Group and includes the following:
 - a) Option 1: Status Quo – continue with the current Minute of Agreement (modified to allow for the extension to Newtonmore)
 - b) Option 2: Development of Charitable Trust to cover the management of the whole Speyside Way
 - c) Option 3: Complete separation (i.e. each planning authority takes responsibility for all the functions associated with Speyside Way management and maintenance within its own area, as specified in the legislation)
 - d) Option 4: As Option 3 but with a pooled resource for the SW that is managed collectively by one of the partners on behalf of the others, to cover such items as:
 - i. central information provision
 - ii. delivery of marketing and interpretation strategies and visitor surveys
 - iii. coordination of major events
 - iv. contributing to national level discussions.
5. The Best Value Review is due to be complete by September 2009. It is proposed that a further paper will be taken to CNPA Board in late October 2009 highlighting the outcome of the review and seeking decisions on the favoured option.
6. The Forum is asked to:
 - a) Note the key conclusions arising from the review of management arrangements, commissioned by CNPA (Annex 2); and
 - b) Advise staff on any further matters that should be considered in shaping future management to the route.

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Annex I:

Summary of Review of Management Arrangements, Commissioned by CNPA

1. A review of the Management of the Speyside Way within the Cairngorms National Park was carried out during Spring 2009 by P4 Projects (Andrea Partridge).
2. The purpose of this review was to explore the most effective options for delivering a high quality long distance route that offers both value for money and meets the needs of all potential users. There were two aspects to the review:
 - a) Examine the tasks currently undertaken by Moray Council (eg. promotion and marketing) and the costs of providing this service and, where possible, separately identify the costs that are associated with the management of the whole route and that part within the Cairngorms National Park;
 - b) Propose costed options for management models of the route within the National Park, highlighting both advantages and disadvantages of both.
3. In relation to part a) the main conclusions drawn are:
 - a) The route has been managed by The Moray Council and partners for a considerable period of time, giving a consistency of management approach along the whole length of the route.
 - b) The route would benefit from revision of the Development and Management Plan (DMP) in light of the revised national standards and a refreshed assessment of priorities so that improvements can be planned appropriately. The revised DMP should have specific and measurable targets to assist in monitoring of progress;
 - c) The overall management approach on the route seems to focus on day-to-day maintenance of the path and the overall route management costs seem high for such basic provision;
 - d) In addition to the above point, the returns received within the National Park seem low when compared to the inputs from the Park Authority – especially with regard to certain themes such as ranger activity, interpretation, and provision of visitor information;
 - e) For a long, linear route the benefits of locating so much of the interpretation and staff resource in one location is questionable and it may be worthwhile examining whether this function can be delivered more effectively through working through a number of information and interpretation centres that are already in place along the route;
 - f) There is significant local demand for improvements to the route to make it more suitable for a wider range of users – such changes are entirely in line with national policy for LDRs.
4. In relation to part b) a number of options were considered in terms of advantages and disadvantages. This material is currently being fed into the ongoing Best Value Review which is being led by Moray Council.