
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Core Paths Planning

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Purpose

This paper seeks the Board's formal adoption of the Core Paths Plan and highlights the next steps towards implementation and monitoring. Related work in how communities might wish to publicise path networks is also detailed.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- a) Adopt the Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park;
- b) Notes how the Plan will be implemented and monitored; and
- c) Notes the development of guidance for community path leaflets.

Executive Summary

The Minister for the Environment has directed the Cairngorms National Park Authority to adopt the Core Paths Plan which was modified in light of the Reporter's recommendations and other advice received. The Board has to formally adopt the Plan as directed by the Minister. Implementation of the Plan forms a key part of the priority programme of work on the development high quality opportunities for outdoor access and the paper highlights how this work will be taken forwards and progress monitored. The paper also summaries new guidance for community path groups which will promote best practice and incorporate prominent use of the National Park brand.

CORE PATHS PLANNING - FOR DECISION

Core Paths Plan Approval

1. The formal, statutory process involved in Core Paths Planning is over once the Board adopts the Plan. However, rather than the end of the process, it should be seen as the beginning as the Plan moves from development to implementation. The next phase will be both exciting and challenging as community aspirations for paths in their area are starting to be met.
2. The process involved in reaching this stage has been both extensive and rewarding. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act placed a duty on the Cairngorms National Park Authority to develop a Core Paths Plan. Over the last three years the Board has provided direction to staff on how this duty should be taken forward. At the Board meeting of 31 October 2008 the Board approved the Draft Plan together with a delegation of authority for any further minor changes to be ratified by the Convenor and Vice Convenor. The Draft Plan was submitted to Ministers on 18 March 2009.
3. The formal consultation resulted in 58 objections of which 35 were resolved through negotiation. There were 23 outstanding objections relating to 51 paths that were not possible to resolve through negotiation and resulted in a Local Inquiry being held. The Reporter agreed with CNPA on all but one of the objections and his recommendation was supported by the Minister in approving the Plan. The only proposed core path that was removed from the network by the Minister was a section of minor road between Nethy Bridge and Dorback Road end. This had been included at a late stage in an attempt to ameliorate two objections – one of which had been withdrawn during final negotiations and the second withdrawn in correspondence between the Reporter and the objector.
4. Two paths on Balmoral Estate were included in the Interim Draft Plan as they were popular and provided links to the wider path network. However on advice received relating to security, CNPA removed these paths prior to the formal consultation. An objection was submitted on their exclusion and the Reporter recommended their inclusion unless the Scottish Ministers consider that the interests of security raised by the Balmoral Estate justify their exclusion. Having taken advice on security the Minister excluded the two paths from the plan. It should be noted that Balmoral Estate have a very positive approach to access management and the two paths can still be used by members of the public.
5. The resulting network now totals 932 kilometres (km) of core path with 844 km on land and 88km on water, 98% of the network already exists leaving 2% still to be constructed. Annex I contains a map showing all core paths in the National Park.
6. The Minister has now directed CNPA to adopt the Plan as approved. The plan will be available in CNPA offices, through the website and a notice will be included in the local press advertising its availability. All land managers who have a core path on their ground will be notified together with the associated implications. In addition, all who corresponded during the consultations will be notified of its adoption and where copies can be viewed.

7. The adoption of the Core Paths Plan will achieve one of the targets set in the Corporate Plan.

Recommendation

8. **It is recommended that:**
 - a) **The Board adopt the Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park**

Implementation of the Plan

9. The real gain from the Core Paths Planning process has been developing an understanding of the wishes and aspirations of communities, and communities of interest, about the importance of particular paths in the National Park. The open process and the various rounds of consultation, combined with Ministerial approval provide a very sound basis on which to move forwards. Now the challenge is to undertake a programme of works which meets the aspirations expressed for the paths. Much of the previous work approved by the Board, for example on directional path sign design, will assist with this process.
10. Park Authority staff will continue discussions with the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust colleagues in refining the programme of works that will result in a high quality network of path in, around and between communities so that everyone can enjoy the special qualities of the National Park. For communities such as Dulnain Bridge where the existing network is fragmented implementing the Plan will result in a well promoted, signposted and waymarked network of routes. This will be mirrored across communities in the National Park over the next two years.
11. There are a number of means by which improvements to the core paths network will come about.
 - a) Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust - Staff have been working closely with colleagues in the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust in shaping a programme of works over this and the next financial year. For example the bridge planned in Strathdon is an aspiration that emerged through the core paths planning process.
 - b) Scottish Rural Development Programme – this has not proved as effective as hoped in delivering path improvements but one large estate has included path maintenance in a forest management plan and staff will continue to press for the Programme to better channel funding to access related works.
 - c) Community led initiatives – Nethy Bridge have been a very effective community in securing sponsorship to maintain their existing path network.
 - d) Guiding national programmes of expenditure – improvements to trunk and other roads provide opportunities to secure better routes for walkers and cyclists. Such an improvement is programmed for the A86 at Laggan where it coincides with a core path.
12. Delivered collectively through these different mechanisms will ensure the following National Park outcomes are achieved:

- a) A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors; and
- b) 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

Monitoring Progress

13. An essential component of meeting these objectives is finding a suitable mechanism with which to measure progress. A methodology has been developed (following consultation with the Local Outdoor Access Forum, the Delivery Team and through a workshop with interested parties) to identify those paths that are “Fit for Purpose”. Periodic reports will be prepared at least annually based on each path in the network passing three key tests:
 - 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 path signs** – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.
14. Annex 2 provides further detail on what is likely to constitute a pass or failure in each of the three tests. This assessment process will enable progress in improving the network to be charted against the indicator of “*increasing the proportion of paths in the network that are fit for purpose to 90% by 2012.*”

Recommendation

15. **It is recommended that:**
 - a) **The Board note how the Plan will be implemented and monitored.**

Community Path Leaflets

16. Many different community path leaflets are produced within the National Park to meet the demand from visitors and promote paths. However:
 - a) many are old and do not meet current best practice in making the information accessible to all;
 - b) many of the maps used are complex and difficult to understand;
 - c) few leaflets reflect core path planning;
 - d) few leaflets reflect changes in access legislation;
 - e) there is no consistent approach to presenting information; and
 - f) few of the leaflets make the most of their location in the National Park or promote neighbouring communities.
17. To address these shortcomings staff have been working with David Warnock and Stirling Surveys (experienced cartographers and leaflet designers) to develop design guidance. Their work has been assisted through the following engagement process:
 - a) Two workshops with community path groups across the National Park on the attributes of a ‘good’ path leaflet;
 - b) Consultation with Inclusive Cairngorms;

- c) Discussion with Royal National Institute for the Blind over specific legibility issues; and
 - d) Review of existing leaflets and research data.
18. This guidance follows national best practice in presentation of text, images and maps. It also aims to produce a consistent template that will allow the development of a recognisable family of branded 'Cairngorms Community Path Leaflets', allowing each community to promote its identity within the National Park.
19. The draft guidance has been piloted in three communities (Nethy Bridge, Kingussie and Ballater) and endorsed by the Local Outdoor Access Forum. The new guidance will be promoted widely and compliance will be a condition of future grant aid.

Recommendation

20. **It is recommended that:**
- a) **The Board notes the development of guidance for community path leaflets.**

Policy Context

21. Providing high quality opportunities for access is a Priority for Action in the National Park Plan. Implementing the Core Paths Plan will therefore significantly assist in delivering this priority and, in addition, the adoption of the Core Paths Plan will achieve one of the 46 targets set in the Corporate Plan. Providing more accessible walking and cycling opportunities will also deliver Scottish Government's outcomes on improving the nation's health and wellbeing.

Delivering Sustainability

22. Implementing the Core Paths Plan will help provide the physical resource which can be used to promote active and healthy lifestyles and will provide accessible networks that can be utilised for recreational or functional purposes. The network will help mitigate against climate change by encouraging people to holiday close to home and reducing car dependency. An excellent range of quality paths will be of value to visitors and so contribute to the local economy. A well planned system of core paths will also help land managers to integrate outdoor access with their operations.

Delivering A Park for All

23. Core paths must meet the needs of residents and visitors. As such those selected will cater for all types of users and, wherever possible, be barrier free. Providing facilities that enable access for all will encourage greater use of the network and demonstrate that the network is for all to use and enjoy. Effective promotion through signage and encouragement of the template for community path leaflets will provide further reassurance for those unsure about where to go and what to expect.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

24. A Park-wide Core Paths Plan will ensure that there is collective recognition of the most important paths. This will provide an excellent basis for a range of future work – for example by ensuring that any new repair or maintenance work will be prioritised (and resources targeted accordingly) or as work to be undertaken

through planning gain. As formally designated paths there will be a significant degree of protection from consequences of development in the future.

Implications

Financial Implications

25. The bulk of implementation will be financed and delivered through the agreed work programme with the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust. The Board has already committed £365,000 for the agreed work programme over the current and 2010/11 financial years. Encouraging revenue streams to ensure capital works are maintained will continue and opportunities from car parking charges and sales from panoramas are two such ways that this is being addressed. Funding COAT's next Business Plan will be coming to the Board later this year.
26. The staff resources required to undertake the full fit for purpose assessment, based on the pilot study already completed, is estimated to be around 10 days.
27. Costs of supporting community path leaflets will be in the vicinity of £500 to £1000 per community depending on the size of the print run.

Presentational Implications

28. Progress on implementation will continue to be highlighted through the website, newsletters and the east and west access groups who both have a representative on the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust's Management Group.

Implications for Stakeholders

29. The main stakeholders are the land managers, the residents and visitors who will use the core paths network. It will be a necessity to continue to work closely with land managers, communities and communities of interest in the development and upgrade of the network.

Next Steps

30. Progress towards the full implementation of the Core Paths Plan will feature in the 4 monthly update to the Board on National Park Plan monitoring.

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19 March 2010

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Annex 2: 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surface robust for expected use (e.g. free draining) • Comfortable for most users • Appropriate width for expected use and location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage is in line with the National Park Policy • Signage is appropriate to location and likely users • Signage is legible and in good condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage is inadequate, in poor condition or absent • Significant junctions lack appropriate signage • Proliferation or location of signs causes confusion or spoils user experience