

## Evaluating the Cairngorms National Park Planning Process

The paper provides an overview of our research on the Cairngorms National Park Planning (CNPP) process from 2006 – 2011. The research was funded through the Scottish Government’s five-year Environment and Rural Stewardship programme to support the adaptive management of the Park by creating a dialogue between researchers and stakeholders. The implications of the results are being taken forward within the Scottish Government’s research programmes 2011-2016. We also wish to thank the many individuals from a range of organisations and businesses who have contributed to our research project, particularly staff at the CNPA.

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## ***Why do this Research?***

Cairngorms National Park (CNP) is an example of the new approach to planning and management that: integrates many different issues; works with many different partners in delivering the desired outcomes; and functions at the local, national and international level. It should be remembered that the first CNPP (2007 – 2012) was an experiment: it was first time a strategic plan for the Cairngorms under the *National Parks (Scotland) Act* had been developed and the model of an enabling National Park Authority is novel.

## ***Purpose of this Paper***

This paper summarises the findings from our five year project but does not present all the detailed findings. It highlights the points that could best inform the transition from the first to the second planning cycle and the consultation process for the next version of the CNPP. The paper is designed to be provocative and to invite discussion about what has already been learnt and where future challenges remain. Some of these challenges can be, or are being, tackled by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and the Board, but others are more generic challenges to be tackled by *all* those delivering the CNPP.

## ***How has the research been done?***

The **research questions** were:

- Who is involved in developing and implementing the CNPP?
- How is the integration of the various issues managed within the CNPP?
- Are there changes in those involved, and the issues raised, over time?

This paper reports on data collected between April 2006 and October 2010. We focused on three of the seven Delivery Teams (Conserving and Enhancing, Integrated Land Management and Enjoying and Understanding) as well as attending some Advisory Forums and the Strategy Group. Therefore, our data only covers some of the ongoing processes and will provide a partial view; although our regular communications with CNPA staff help to ensure we remained as up to date as possible.

We have collected more than 90 pieces of data, comprising:

- Field notes from 2006 consultation processes
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from national, regional and local organisations plus land managers
- Field notes from discussions with CNPA staff
- Field notes from Board, Strategy Group, Forum and Delivery Team meetings; and
- Various supporting documents such as the Board papers and update papers etc.

These different data provide multiple perspectives on the development of the CNPP. The data are mainly qualitative in order to explain why certain trends might be occurring rather than ‘proving’ relationships using statistical analysis. The framework was designed to collect data over time with minimal requirements from stakeholders and within a modest research budget. We have more data from the early parts of the process than later on. There was an important shift in the data collection from analysing the consultation and preparation of the plan to analysing the delivery of the plan. This latter stage quickly became diffuse; as some meetings became less frequent, were cancelled or we were unable to attend them due to other commitments. This relative lack of later data may affect the findings and analysis.

## ***Summary***

It is very difficult to summarise five years of rich data into one paper, let alone a one page summary! The findings are presented under the following categories:

- *Consolidating the concept of a Scottish National Park:* Scottish National Parks are special living and working landscapes delivered by a range of partners, not just the CNPA. However, what is ‘special’ is not always self-evident or agreed.
- *Geography matters:* The CNPA have had to build a shared sense of the ‘Park’ divided by the Cairngorms massif. This has been assisted by the development of pan-Park organisations, but there is still a perceived difference between the East and West of the Park. The need to balance Park-wide and spatially differentiated actions has been recognised for the next CNPP.
- *The need for integration and coordination:* The CNPP is the mechanism to align activities by multiple partners. There are statutory requirements for public bodies, but the emphasis is on voluntary collective action, coordinated by the CNPA. Some welcome this coordination and see the ‘added-value’ but others feel the CNPA is an unnecessary ‘layer of bureaucracy’.
- *The appropriate planning scale(s):* The CNPP operates at multiple levels from a strategic vision through five year Priorities For Action to delivery of specific projects. It has been difficult to align stakeholder engagement with these three levels. The CNPA acts both as an enabling authority for the CNPP and a statutory planning authority for the Local Development Plan.
- *Developing and consulting on the CNPP:* originally stakeholders were unsure if the concerns raised in consultation would be acted upon and who (the Board or the Strategy Group) should ratify the draft CNPP to be presented to the Minister. In terms of content, there was a tension between focussing on Park specific issues and wider issues of sustainability. Originally, partners sought ‘SMART’ and costed action plans, but more recently, the focus on outcomes has been recognised as a more flexible approach.
- *Implementing the CNPP:* there has been a focus on ‘delivery’ with the CNPA taking more of a leadership role where monitoring illustrated progress was not being made. Prioritisation within each Priority for Action occurred to take account of constrained resources and the inability to tackle all the actions at once. The links between the short-term PFAs and the longer term strategic objectives were unclear to many, which is being addressed in the next CNPP.
- *Engagement and types of stakeholder:* there is a hierarchy of engagement, mainly distinguishing stakeholders who have direct contact with the CNPP process and those who are represented via intermediaries. There are different levels of interaction: e.g. communities and visitors are engaged at the level of projects rather than the CNPP, except for certain points in the CNPP cycle, when they are directly engaged (e.g. during formal consultation periods). The commitment, capacity and capability of representatives vary depending on how much they value the concept of a National Park. This is not a simple public sector: private sector split, but depends on the perceived advantages conferred by the National Park status.
- *Decision making and legitimacy:* the decision making processes within the implementation stage were often unclear to us. There was a decrease in formal, minuted meetings and an increase in informal bi-lateral meetings, which seem to be more effective at building and retaining commitment from partner organisations. The CNPA answers to its Board and the Minister, but it is not clear how collective delivery is scrutinised and held accountable. This role seems to be shared between the Scottish Government, the Strategy Group and the CNPA Board.

A summary of the lessons already learnt by the CNPA and the challenges that remain are shown in the table below. Unfortunately, there are no ‘magic bullets’ for these challenges faced by most spatial planning processes.

<b>Lessons Learnt</b>	<b>Challenges Remaining</b>
The CNPA are a learning organisation; they have identified and invested in training and tried to acknowledge their mistakes.	The CNPA must balance practical and strategic aspirations. The links between the Priorities For Actions and the longer term Strategic Objectives are unclear.
The CNPA have adapted to a change in Government, four changes in Ministers and many new policies. They have altered their approach when things appeared not to be working.	CNPA struggles to ensure the CNPP is considered alongside other partners’ plans, policies and strategies, particularly where partners have responsibility to manage both ‘special’ areas within the Park, and other areas outwith the Park.
The CNPA have demonstrated how the National Park is a centre for innovation; and embedded the concept of a Scottish National Park as a living and working landscape, delivered by a range of partners.	Individual commitment doesn’t always translate into organisational commitment – maintaining these commitments within current financial constraints remains a constant requirement.
The traffic-light approach to progress helped the CNPA’s focus on relationships building, resulting in increased ownership of the CNPP despite the economic conditions.	There was a diversity of views regarding whether the CNPA listens and the degree to which their leadership is accepted. Relationship building with land based industries and communities of place still needs attention.
The CNPA will produce a shorter CNPP next time that outlines a shared vision with agreed outcomes, and balances Pan-Park delivery mechanisms with the recognition of the differences within the Park.	Relying on a close-knit and trusted group of partners can favour ‘business as usual’ approaches due to the potential for ‘group think’ from the ‘usual suspects’.
The CNPA recognise that many stakeholders don’t distinguish between the CNPP and the Local Development Plan, so are running coordinated consultation processes to capture community feedback on priorities for both planning processes.	It is unclear who is expected to resolve the conflicts arising from trade-offs and integration challenges. Scrutinising collective delivery of the CNPP needs engagement from ‘above’ – Scottish Government – and ‘below’ via the Strategy Group and the elected representatives on the Board.

## Consolidating the concept of a Scottish National Park

There have been two main aspects to establishing a shared conceptualisation of the National Park: to ensure people understand that a Scottish National Park is different from other models of protected areas through its focus on sustainable development; and to ensure that people recognise that the Cairngorms National Park is a collective enterprise, that is delivered by the CNPA in partnership with many others. The Cairngorms National Park (CNP) is a territorial definition - a line on the map - that represents a statutory designation as a special place. However, the designated territory also is imbued with a set of management objectives to be delivered by a network of local, regional and national actors. The objectives are set out in the National Park (Scotland) Act and the mechanism for delivering the objectives is the CNPP. As Dinnie et al (2011) highlight, the CNPA have spent a considerable amount of energy on trying to distinguish between the concept of the CNP - a special place - and the CNPA. This distinction relates to being an 'enabling' authority not a delivery organisation. It highlights the need for other 'partners' to be involved both in the coordination of activities within the CNP and in the delivery of the Act's aims.

The distinction between the CNP and the CNPA is important although not always clearly understood - crudely, where respondents confused the notion of the Park with the Park Authority, it generally signaled a lack of ownership of the CNPP and a sense that the plan was the CNPA's responsibility. This confusion appears to have lessened over time within the 'partner' organisations engaged in the Delivery Teams (DTs). Our data doesn't tell us about perceptions of wider stakeholders, such as local residents or visitors. Initially, many stakeholders were also very confused about the differences between the CNPP (a strategic plan that was not spatially specific) and the Local Development Plan (specific to those issues subject to national planning framework and planning regulations; which is spatially specific and dictates conditions for development). This confusion lessened over time within our data set, although may still persist within the wider population.

Threaded through many meetings and discussions is the notion that the CNP is special, unique and requires different methods of delivery. During the development of the CNPP, there were considerable differences in how stakeholders perceived the role and rationale of a National Park and the balance between the four aims. The phrase 'the special qualities of the National Park' has been extensively used during implementation, but to an outsider, these special qualities are not always defined or self-evident. Furthermore, illustrating that having a National Park makes a difference is problematic when the criteria by which various individuals and organisations judge 'difference' are not homogenous, static or even explicit. One example is that illustrating how a National Park is different to other areas creates tensions for other partners with important roles and responsibilities for areas beyond the National Park boundary.

## Geography matters

The CNP is centred around a montane massif, with transport routes and settlements distributed around the edges. These areas have traditionally faced away from each other and towards the dominant urban regions (home to the corresponding local authorities) on the coastal/lowland areas. The CNPA have had to build a shared sense of place that reverses this tradition; and encourage stakeholders to face inwards with the Park. Certainly, the CNPA have made a great effort to brand the spatial area with boundary markers, supporting signage and visitor information; and to market the area as a National Park. The CNPA also have initiated and/or funded pan-Cairngorms umbrella organisations, such as the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils (ACCC) or the more recent Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) extending the existing Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce. Also, the Board; Advisory Forums and Delivery Teams continue to meet in venues around the Park to increase accessibility to people living in the different areas. This 'place building' process was further complicated when the Scottish Government altered the boundary of the Park to include part of Perth and Kinross Local Authority area; with knock on effects on membership of stakeholder groups and the Board; and necessitating new efforts to build a shared stakeholder community with these new representatives.

Despite these efforts, this shared sense of place is still a long way from being embedded. References to 'sides' of the Park continue in meetings during 2010; and some interviewees felt that certain areas, particularly the Angus Glens, were 'neglected'. We detect a divide between the highly developed Spey Corridor and the other, less developed, areas of the Park, particularly Deeside, Moray and the Glens. This is not simply jealousy - some participants were concerned that the Spey corridor was over developed and wished to avoid this in other areas; and some felt that there were important cultural, land tenure and demographic differences that explained the different trajectories within the Park. However, it appears that the CNPA and pan-CNP umbrella organisations will need to continue to ensure they do engage with all areas of the Park and all benefit from the CNP designation.

Despite strong lobbying from certain stakeholders during the development of the current CNPP; the decision was taken not to 'zone' areas of the Park. This was to (a) avoid confusion with the local development plan and (b) to reassure land owners that the CNPP was not going to disadvantage private enterprise by constraints on their activities. Therefore it is interesting that a more spatially targeted approach is on the agenda for the next CNPP. This recognises the different qualities of different areas of the Park but will not extend to lines on the map dictating land use or restrictions on activities. Our data suggests that this shift might be due to the perception, by some (mainly public sector and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) stakeholders), that the CNPA has functioned more as a 'development agency' to the detriment of the duty to conserve natural and cultural heritage. Therefore, a more differentiated approach to the Park, with different weights on different aspects of the Act, was required.

## **The Need for Integration and Coordination**

The CNPP is the mechanism by which the delivery of the Act's objectives is coordinated and integrated. As there is political distaste for using coercion (statutory requirements) and fiscal limits on financial incentives, the focus is on voluntary collective action to deliver the CNPP. This collective action needs some form of organisation and management. The CNPA are charged with ensuring the CNPP is delivered, although there are also statutory requirements on other public agencies. However, private enterprises and NGOs can't be coerced into delivering the objectives, which is why the focus on enabling and encouraging is so strong. Some of these stakeholders also desire better integration and coordination.

Exactly who is responsible for integrating/coordinating what is less clear cut than the Act might suggest. Furthermore, exactly how best to achieve integration and coordination is contested. Some welcome the CNPA's attempts to coordinate activities; whilst others think that the CNPA has added 'another layer of bureaucracy' and has complicated rather than simplified integration. Crudely, the different approaches are partly to do with the complexity of the stakeholders' own interests - those with single issue focus may value the CNPA less than those working across multiple policies and processes. Therefore, the legitimacy (social acceptance) of the CNPA's leadership of integration and coordination is also contested.

This contestation and lack of clarity might explain the ongoing desire by the CNPA to demonstrate how their existence has made a positive difference, often articulated as 'added value'. There were many discussions of when and how to take credit for positive changes in the CNP; and equally, complaints from other 'partners' about allocating credit to the CNPP and the CNPA when the projects or outcomes would have happened anyway. This tension has become more acute in the constrained funding environment 2008 – 2010. There is delicate balance between aligning the CNPP with partners' 'core business', whilst illustrating that the CNPA help to deliver something greater than the sum its parts through the shared focus on the CNPP.

## **The Appropriate Planning Scale(s)**

Related to the idea of integration and coordination is the fact that (1) the CNPA (and other partners) simultaneously act at multiple levels of planning and delivery; and (2) have to work within local, regional and national arenas. With regard to the first issue, there are number of activities taking place within the territory of the CNP. The CNPP is described as a strategic plan that sets out long term strategic objectives. Therefore, the

CNPP its delivery, are supposed to be about achieving a high level and systemic vision for the CNP. However, ensuring that these strategic objectives are delivered requires tactical decisions about what is to be done, by whom, when and where within the Park, which is the role of the five year Priorities For Action (PFAs). However, delivery of the PFAs comes down to the operational level of individual projects and activities. It has proved difficult to maintain the simultaneous focus on all three layers; and to ensure that each layer was linked to each other. There seems to have been most focus on the delivery of the PFAs, with a consequent lack of focus on the strategic objectives and the guiding principles. At times the PFA focus has strayed into the detail of individual projects rather than how individual projects are coordinated to deliver the overall objective of the PFA.

The implementation of the CNPP set out complementary governance and engagement mechanisms: a joined up Government group - renamed the Strategy Group for strategic overview and alignment; Advisory Forums (AFs) to consider how the three main aspects of the CNPP were being delivered; Delivery Teams (DTs) for the individual PFAs and finally project teams (although our data collection did not extend to these). There have been difficulties operationalising this structure. The Strategy Group has not met formally since 2009 although bilateral discussions with these representatives have been held during 2010-11; and the group will meet to ratify the draft CNPP in early 2012. There have been numerous re-organisations of the AFs, with many becoming virtually dormant in 2008 - 9; and have now been resurrected into a more 'demand-led' deliberative forum focused on specific interests e.g. the Farmers Forum. Whilst this will no doubt improve stakeholder engagement, it is unclear how these will provide the strategic advice about direction of travel that was originally envisaged. Equally, many of the DTs have been reorganised.

The CNPA accepted that the structures were not working and sought to adapt the structures to deliver what was needed. However, these current arrangements still struggle to target the different levels of planning required and how to maintain links between them. Overall, this raises questions about who has oversight of the strategic trends within the CNP and whether the objectives are being delivered. From our perspective, it would seem this responsibility will fall more squarely on the Board. A counter argument is that the strategic direction is more important when reviewing the old CNPP and setting out the content for the new CNPP; and it is more appropriate to focus on tactical issues during the implementation phase. This explains why groups like the Strategy Group are more active during some phases than others.

The second issue relates back to the complicated nature of who integrates and coordinates (see above); the discussion of decision making (especially direction by the Scottish Government) and the nature of stakeholder engagement (see sections below). The Local Development Plan may explain differences in how stakeholders perceive and interact with the CNPA. Many small businesses and individuals tended to focus on development plan issues when praising or criticising the actions of the CNPA; and struggled to talk about the wider strategic objectives of the CNPP. The Local Development Plan has been relatively controversial, including a public inquiry and delays in formalisation, probably due to its statutory (therefore coercive) nature, which prohibits certain activities, unlike the more enabling aspiration of the CNPP. Therefore, the CNPA as an organisation has to straddle two identities - the positive face of an enabling authority - and the less positive face of a statutory planning authority. This has implications for decision making and legitimacy; and the work needed to develop and sustain partnerships.

## **Developing and Consulting on the CNPP<sup>1</sup>**

The consultation phase in 2006 was affected by the timing of the Scottish elections and 'consultation fatigue' in communities of place and of interest, whereby representatives were struggling to keep up with all the demands placed on them. During the consultation phase, a suspicion was voiced by some stakeholders that their comments would not be listened to, and that the public agencies were more influential than other voices in the

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<sup>1</sup> Our data collection and analysis does not cover the formal consultation on the draft CNPP 2012 – 2017.

development of the CNPP. There were two procedural concerns. Firstly, there was some confusion over how, and which, stakeholders could influence how the draft CNPP was altered in response to the consultation. Secondly, because the CNPA has the statutory duty to prepare the plan but the CNPP is delivered in partnership with others, there was a discussion over how to synchronize the endorsement of the Plan by both the CNPA Board and Strategy Group.

There were two main aspects about the CNPP content to note. Firstly, there were different opinions regarding to what extent the CNPP should restrict delivery to issues that are exclusive to the National Park and allow generic nation-wide issues to be resolved by existing nation-wide solutions. Secondly, a criticism was that there were no priorities set within each PFA and that these PFA were not costed or SMART (SMART meaning Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-limited). Many partners were concerned that they would not have the resources to implement the PFAs, and therefore the CNPP would raise unrealistic expectations. However, others were concerned that only noting actions that were already resourced would not provide a visionary plan for the Park. The next CNPP will focus on agreed and measurable five year outcomes, allowing partners to respond to future funding opportunities, policy signals and other factors that influence implementation. This is also in line with the focus on outcomes under the current SNP administration.

## Implementing the CNPP

The implementation process has continually evolved (e.g. revising the membership of DTs and AFs and experimenting with how progress is tracked and presented). There was a loss of momentum between submitting the CNPP and starting the implementation process, due to a lag in securing resources in multiple partners' annual budgets. An increasing effort went into showing that the processes involved in strategic park planning (the plan itself and supporting groups) were 'delivering' rather than just being 'a talking shop' or 'another layer of bureaucracy'. However, it is still quite difficult to understand how this delivery is supposed to occur - whether as a result of the designation of the Park; the actions of the CNPA; or the individual actions implementing measures specified in the CNPP. Most 2010 interviewees were unable to disentangle these three aspects; and similar questions were raised in DT meetings. The CNPA staff originally seemed keen to link positive stories about progress to the CNPP's objectives and priorities. Over time, they became content with a link to the CNP brand, rather than specifically to the CNPP or the CNPA.

Monitoring appeared to be seen as the way to ensure progress; to demonstrate accountability for public funding and to retain public support. Many of the DTs were concerned with ensuring they had sufficient evidence and indicators to track progress. Positive trends acted as a morale boost and to unite the group. Talking about the need to monitor, what to monitor and how to use the results did start to create a common language within the AFs and DTs, and focus them on a shared and holistic overview of the CNPP. However, it seems that it is easier to talk about the need to monitor than to actually collect data; discuss monitoring results and/or agree what the results mean in terms of outcomes.

The CNPA led a 'mid-term' health check of the CNPP and introduced quarterly updates that reported on progress against targets in PFAs using a red, amber and green coding. Possibly in response to having some actions in the red, the CNPA started to take more of a leadership role due to a concern that some partners were not delivering the CNPP. This also coincided with the global economic downturn and a corresponding increase in concern over delivery in the context of scarce resources. This also might explain why a more active approach to sustaining commitment from partners was required in the later part of the data collection period, to ensure that organisations did not withdraw resources from projects and/or strategic coordination processes.

Around this time, the language shifted from monitoring progress against targets to achievement of outcomes, which appears to be a self conscious alignment by the CNPA with Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and Local Authority Single Outcome agreements. The CNPA staff argued that it was more important to focus on what needed to be done, than to specify how it was to be achieved; and to try to tie things too tightly to the PFA actions in the CNPP. An example of this is the fact that some issues, missing or downplayed in the



CNPP, were introduced - such as a focus on climate change or more recently, an interest in delivering a land use strategy through an ecosystems approach. This shows both adaptive management; and a move away from using the CNPP as a rigid operational plan.

The implementation experience showed that some PFAs were too ambitious to be achieved in the allotted five years. Therefore, there was a process of prioritisation within each PFA, focusing on those actions that could be realistically delivered. The prioritisation focused on those outcomes that were most compliant with partners' wishes or available funding sources; rather than the fit with the CNPP, or its guiding principles. This is pragmatic and ensures delivery, but risks sustaining the status quo with implications for issues such as social justice and lock-in to unsustainable trends. Change is integral to the CNPP as it is the vehicle for delivering a new approach to integrated and sustainable development in the Cairngorms. However, the main drivers of change appear to be 'top down' e.g. Scottish/UK/European government policies, climate change and the changing macro-economic climate. There were very few references to 'bottom up' drivers such as the specific expressed needs of communities of interest and place, despite the references to the need to be inclusive, to engage 'the public' and ensure that the National Park delivered for local communities as well as the nation.

CNPA staff recognise the link between longer term objectives and the PFAs; and the Scottish Government policy priorities are also about long-term issues (e.g. climate change). However, these longer term trends were rarely discussed in meetings involving stakeholders. Many of the interviewees in 2010 were not clear what the long term objectives of the existing CNPP were; and had no idea if these objectives were likely to be achieved, even if they were aware of progress being made on PFAs. This highlights the challenge in trying to balance short term delivery of outcomes, with retaining a long-term, strategic focus.

## Engagement and Types of Stakeholder

Figure One demonstrates the organisations involved in the first three levels of our hierarchy and the structures through which they are engaged. Public agencies (national and local authorities) are engaged in all three of the CNPP mechanisms (DTs; AFs and the Strategy Group). Local Authorities tend to focus more on social and economic development; whilst the national public agencies tend to focus more on environmental aspects. The AFs offer the main opportunity for voluntary sector, private and local interests to input to the CNPP process. These forums have been restructured to make them more responsive to the stakeholders' needs. The two new forums –Land Management and Sustainable Tourism - will join a further three forums run by the CNPA. There are further forums run by others (e.g. the Youth Forum) and it is unclear how the issues raised in these latter forums are communicated and considered within the CNPP process.

The 'how' of engaging stakeholders is covered above but who is engaged remains a contested subject. We perceive a contrast between the often expressed but rather vague desire to engage the 'public' and local residents and the more targeted approach to working with other public sector bodies and specific NGOs. The pattern of attendance at the three main formal CNPP engagement mechanisms (the DTs; the AFs and the Strategy Group) reinforced our earlier analysis of a hierarchy of engagement. The CNPA staff had most interaction with 'People like the CNPA' (representatives of public agencies); some with People the CNPA need (those that do not have a statutory duty within the Park but without whom the Plan cannot be delivered) and People CNPA ought to engage (voluntary organisations representing the public interest in the National Park) and least interaction with the 'Public'.

To some extent, this hierarchy still exists, despite the laudable efforts of the CNPA to try to engage more frequently with land managers and local communities; and with visitors through access and awareness-raising mechanisms. There is a distinction between those interests that are engaged directly, through multi-stakeholder or bi-lateral meetings; and those who are indirectly engaged as they must work through intermediaries such as CNPA staff or membership organisations. A further complication is that umbrella organisations struggle to represent the range of views held by their members; although they do try to act as a communication conduit.

Local communities are not directly engaged in the implementation processes but are represented through the ACCC and the Board itself. Engagement also occurs via community planning processes, including ongoing community needs audits within the Park; and as part of specific initiatives (e.g. Core Path Planning). These provide information about communities' values and priorities. These 'bottom up' views are shared between staff within the CNPA and provide the context for future CNPP development but do not give individuals a direct voice within the CNPP process. Some 2010 interviewees still sought more direct interaction with the CNPA and the CNPP. However, not only would it be impossible to resource frequent 1:1 meetings with individuals but the CNPA staff question how much capacity there is for individuals to engage more frequently than they do at present.

It is striking to compare the logos on the CNPP to the logos on later progress reports, illustrating success in involving a much broader set of partners in delivering projects. However, there was an interesting difference of opinion within the 2010 interviewees; with some (notably from partners who attended DTs) suggesting that the CNPA had made a real effort to be inclusive and engage widely; compared to others who felt that individuals and residents were not engaged. These were often land owners, who seemed to expect the CNPA staff to liaise directly with them, rather than being represented via an umbrella organisation. This difference might be down to different expectations of what 'good' engagement is; or different experiences - those who are 'at the table' may hear lots of talk of engagement; but others seem to be unaware of the efforts being made.

One argument is that different types of stakeholders should be engaged at different stages in the planning cycle. Local communities, members of the public, visitors and national NGOs are engaged through formal consultation processes, but during the implementation phase, the focus moves to 'delivery partners'. Where this neat division breaks down is the engagement with businesses - some sectors e.g. tourism seem to work well through the intermediaries on the DTs but others, particularly estates and farmers are still feel excluded. This argument has implications for power as without presence it is hard to have influence - these same 'delivery partners' are also helping to set the agenda for the next CNPP; meaning that those not involved in the DTs and bi-lateral meetings are at a disadvantage. This raises wider questions about which stakeholder groups should be given more or less weight in the governance process.

There were some interesting observations that public agency and NGO representatives tend to 'self censor' and avoid criticism of other partners; compared to the private sector who were often quite combative. Many of these representatives were critical of the public/NGO sector, including the CNPA, for being too slow to act; soaking up funding for coordination when it should be channeled into funding projects; and/or being impractical. These individuals implied that the private sector could have 'added more value' to the CNPP if they had had more influence in the delivery process. However, there is no guarantee that the interests of the private sector would necessarily align with the objectives of the Act or deliver the CNPP.

Some private sector interests provide constructive criticism - they hold the CNPA and others to account, but are willing to take responsibility for delivering the CNPP. These tend to be from the West of the Park and/or in the service sector, corresponding to those who might benefit the most from CNP designation. Others are resistant - seeing the CNPP as something that applies to the CNPA or the public sector only; and/or something that gets in the way of their traditional stewardship. The attitudes range from resenting the CNPA and CNPP to grudging acceptance that these are here to stay and so these businesses need to get what they can from the process. However, there is no sense of responsibility to a collective Park stakeholder group; instead a more individualistic focus on what the CNP and CNPA can do for them was common.

Retaining commitment requires that the transaction costs involved in partnership working must be seen to be worthwhile and deliver benefits to the partners as well as to the Park and to Scotland. Commitment is often measured by the degree of resource (normally money, but occasionally staff time or data) that is pledged to enable a project to be delivered, rather than to a shared vision or the strategic direction of the National Park. There seem to be a variety of motivations for individuals, groups and organisations to become involved in delivering the CNPP - from meeting public policy targets to protecting commercial interests - and these

different motivations influence the roles and responsibilities that individuals take forward within the DTs, AFs and the Strategy Group.

## Decision Making and Legitimacy

The development and sign off of the CNPP was relatively clear. The choice of content was less clear, but these choices were legitimated by the Board and then the Ministers' sign off. However, implementation decision making has been much harder to follow. It could be argued that the focus has been on implementing already agreed decisions. However, prioritisation implies decision making, albeit on a tactical or operational scale. It is difficult, from our data, to see who makes these decisions, and where/how the decisions are made as the majority of implementation meetings have not been formally minuted and the informal charring style means it is often unclear if a final decision was made. Decisions are not generally made at DT, AF or SG meetings but within informal and one-to-one discussions and then presented to the Board (see later).

There has been a marked reduction in formal, multi-stakeholder meetings. This was a deliberate choice by the CNPA in response to the perception that these processes were not 'cost-effective' i.e. they were taking up valuable staff time from organisations without leading to useful outcomes. There seem to be several reasons for the failure of these deliberative groups to work. One thing was the difficulty of ensuring that each group was focused on the appropriate level of planning; the SG failed to offer strategic direction; the AFs did not really advise on broad topics; and the DTs tend to focus on project delivery rather direction and coordination. Therefore the CNPP DT, AF and SG meetings provide an arena for issues to be aired and views to be expressed; for future decisions to be signposted or existing decisions fed back.

Conflicting views were often displaced to follow up meetings. Some partners appear to like the informality of this approach, as the 'private' nature of the discussions means they can be both more honest, and also more aspirational, than they could if all comments were formally minuted. The infrequent collective meetings are used to ratify and reinforce these agreements; indeed a function of the meetings is to use public 'peer pressure' to confirm commitment to delivery. This strategy is obviously one adopted after considerable trial and error and is felt to work. These bi-lateral meetings allow the CNPA to better understand the individual needs of the organisation and to discuss sensitive topics. However, it does mean that the collective meetings become reduced to information sharing and 'rubber stamping' previous negotiations. It also greatly diminishes the transparency of how decisions are made within these groups, which may challenge the legitimacy of these processes and/or reinforce suspicions about bias in stakeholder influence. There still remains the age-old question of how to hold the private sector accountable for delivery of a spatial plan.

Another common complaint, by both CNPA staff and interviewees, was that the 'wrong' participant attended - often lacking a mandate to speak on behalf of their organisation or members; or without sufficient seniority to ensure that actions were implemented. The CNPA staff invested considerable time and effort in relationship building, albeit with more of a focus on organised stakeholders, particularly public sector organisations. CNPA staff were candid about 'difficult' partners who were perceived as 'blocking' the collective delivery of the CNPP. This may be due to personality differences, lack of capacity (resources) or lack of capability (lack of competence or authority to make things happen).

The CNPA has tried to fulfill its role as an 'enabling authority'. The phrase sets up an oxymoron to some extent, as authority implies direction, if not coercion, whereas enabling is about supporting and encouraging. As noted above, the CNPA has deliberately tried to provide greater leadership, but even within this process, has had to balance firm direction with maintaining strong inter-organisational and inter-personal relationships. When looking at delivery of the CNPP rather than the local plan, the CNPA has very few sanctions or incentives, and therefore relies on using persuasion to achieve compliance with its aims - hence the focus on relationships. At times, 'partners' have resisted too much 'leadership' and interviewees argued that occasionally CNPA staff were not willing to see things from an alternative perspective or failed to communicate in a timely manner, making the partners feel like decisions were made without their input.

The difficulties experienced have implications for the concept of legitimacy or retaining the 'social contract' to make decisions on behalf of society. As a new organisation, tasked with embedding a new institution (the CNP and its objectives), the CNPA has worked hard to demonstrate its right to exist, and the benefits that 'society' derive from its existence. We suggest that the CNPA gains its legitimacy in several ways. Firstly, formal legitimacy is conferred by it being a non-department public body, i.e. through its creation and support by the Scottish Government; whilst the CNPP gains legitimacy from the ministerial sign off. The relatively positive outcome of the National Park Review process reinforced this legitimacy claim. Secondly, formal legitimacy is also conferred by the ratification of CNPA papers by their Board, including the CNPP, but also the stages leading up on the plan's publication and throughout its implementation. The Board is given this role of conferring legitimacy to the actions of the CNPA through the Act, but also through its representative nature. The Board consists of members appointed by Scottish Government, by the five local authorities (representing those elected by park residents and their hinterlands) and directly elected by Park residents. In other words, the Board is accountable to Scottish Ministers *and* to the local electorate.

Another way that the CNPA sustains its legitimacy (its social contract with society) seems to be through claims to moral authority – the CNPA is a good thing to have as it ensures that public goods are delivered for the benefit of society. This explains the focus on delivery and showing how the CNP, the CNPP and the CNPA have 'added value'. However, it also raises questions about who decides which public goods are desired; and assumes a consensus from 'society' that the Act's objectives are equally valued and can be delivered simultaneously. However, our data illustrates that different stakeholders have very different weightings regarding issues such as economic development or nature conservation. Whilst some interviewees felt the CNPA were doing a great job; others were more critical, mainly due to having different priorities and interests. We have already mentioned the ongoing struggle over economic development versus nature conservation; but other criticisms included the lack of attention to cultural heritage, social justice and community empowerment.

Delivery of the Act's objectives via the CNPP is a multi-level governance process. Not only does Scottish Government designate and fund the CNPA and sign off the CNPP, it also gives wider policy direction both to CNPA and to their partners. Therefore, when a partner is being 'difficult', the CNPA can allude to the fact this partner is out of step with the Scottish Government. This is a veiled threat, as the Scottish Government has far more sanctions and incentives available to direct activities by public and private organisations than the CNPA. In theory, the Scottish Government could assist with ensuring that collective responsibility is taken for delivering the CNPP. Most influence could be wielded over public sector organisations, given their responsibility for delivery as written in the Act. Scottish Government could also direct their agencies to use existing incentives to influence the behaviour of private individuals and firms more effectively.

Our data suggests that the Scottish Government has not been a particularly active partner in this governance relationship. It has set out a policy context that reinforces some of the principles by which the CNPP was developed and the CNPA has worked hard to align delivery with wider policy initiatives. However, examples like the delivery of SRDP funding, so essential for delivering some of the PFAs, illustrate that the Park is not always privileged. Interview data also suggest that Scottish Government see their role as setting out a policy agenda but the implementation problems are for their agencies to sort out. Thus, the CNPA may be doubly disadvantaged as it is labeled part of the government by anti-government stakeholders; yet does not have the coercive force of government when required. On the other hand, enabling authority may require this distancing from Government coercion, in order to sustain influence based on moral authority, trust and good will.

Being an enabling authority raises questions about responsibility and accountability. There is no formal relationship of authority between the Board and other partner organisations. Where decisions taken (e.g. changing the AFs; how to engage with the public) affected organisations beyond the CNPA, the paper put to the Board included outcomes of earlier discussions with partner organisations. This returns us to the question of whether the CNPA Board has a role to represent multiple organisations and communities of place and interest; or

just to scrutinise and direct the actions of the CNPA<sup>2</sup>. The CNPA's success in catalysing and coordinating actions by others can be addressed by the Board, but there is an accountability gap regarding the collective delivery of the Park Plan. The ideal of the Strategy Group is for these representatives to take collective responsibility for delivery of the CNPP and provide strategic direction alongside the Board which does the same for the CNPA. Our data seems to imply that bi-lateral discussions have been more effective, whereby partners feed their views into the Board's decision making processes, using CNPA staff as intermediaries. However, these arrangements offer less direct scrutiny and accountability; and place the CNPA Board in the difficult position of implicitly scrutinising the actions of many partners, not just the CNPA. Therefore, it would seem to us, that wider responsibility is dispersed and dissipated; and there are weak direct accountability mechanisms.

### **Things that CNPA have learnt:**

There has been useful reflection on what has been learnt, with several changes already made or being discussed. The CNPA have demonstrated that they are a learning organisation and are enthusiastic about learning from other organisations; other regions (from within the UK to international collaborations) and applying existing frameworks, e.g. National Standards for Community Engagement, to try to ensure they are delivering good practice. They have both identified and invested in training their staff in aspects such as leadership, facilitation and communication. The CNPA have tried to be open and acknowledge their mistakes.

The CNPA have adapted to a change in Government, four changes in Ministers and many new policy imperatives, and have tried to use these changes to build commitment to the CNP. They have changed internal management and communication structures and adapted their approaches to engagement when they felt that existing processes weren't working. For example, switching from large formal multi-stakeholder platforms to smaller focused groups who know and trust one another.

The CNPA have been generous about sharing success stories and including other partners in their publicity. They also have been very successful at persuading national and regional partners to utilize the National Park for pilot studies, demonstrating how the National Park is a centre for innovation. The concept of a Scottish National Park as a living and working landscape, delivered by a range of partners, seems to be well embedded.

The CNPA are continually seeking ways to get more ownership of the CNPP process, whilst being prepared to show more leadership when required. Adopting the traffic-light approach as a check on progress helped indicate where more effort was needed by all concerned. The CNPA have recognised the ratio of formal to behind the scenes communication required to deliver partnership working. They continue to focus on maturing relationships with other organisations and embedding of the partnership concept into the next CNPP. There has been increased efforts made to engage local residents and land managers and there are signs of positive responses from some of the private sector.

The CNPA have learnt from the limitations of the current CNPP structure and are hoping to produce a shorter CNPP next time that outlines a shared vision with agreed outcomes, but provides flexibility about how these outcomes will be achieved. This is aligned with the Scottish Government philosophy. They are balancing the need to support a pan-Park identity and delivery mechanisms with the recognition of the differences within the Park.

The CNPA recognise that many stakeholders don't distinguish between their dual identity as an enabling authority for the CNPP and a statutory authority for the Local Development Plan. They will run coordinated consultation processes for the local and National Park Plan in future, ensuring that the CNPA officers rather than the communities of place and interest do the work in separating what issues are relevant to what plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Which encompass more than just delivering the NPP but include the local planning functions and corporate governance.

## Challenges remaining

Many challenges remain, which reflects the difficulty in achieving the aims of the Act simultaneously. These challenges afflict most spatial planning processes and there are no magic bullets available to resolve them. Instead, they require ongoing reflection, discussion and transparent decisions made by legitimate governance structures.

The Act and its articulation in the CNPP requires a great many trade-offs. The CNPA must balance delivery of short-term outcomes with longer term strategic vision; often requiring a balance between what is practical and aspirations to be more innovative. Although there is evidence of adaptive management, there is less evidence of the adaptation being guided by horizon scanning for future challenges and risks, or exactly how the links between the PFAs and the longer term Strategic Objectives are operationalised. The risk with adopting a pragmatic approach is that business as usual prevails, limiting the CNP's delivery of sustainable development solutions.

The CNPP is embedded in a strategic policy environment but it remains challenging for the CNPA to ensure the CNPP is considered alongside other partners' plans, policies and strategies. Yet it is this integration that will also help tease out where the CNPP can add value to national sustainability issues and which other issues should not be included in the next CNPP. Furthermore, the Act designates the CNP as 'special' yet many of the delivery partners have responsibility to manage both 'special' areas within the Park, and other areas outwith the Park.

It is still unclear who is expected to resolve the conflicts arising from these trade-offs and integration challenges. Does the Board have the responsibility to hold other organisations to account regarding delivery of the CNPP; or is this the role for Scottish Government? The difficulties in holding private interests to account for delivering the CNPP remain. It is also unclear how stakeholders hold the Board and the Strategy group to account for decisions made on their behalf, beyond the traditional mechanisms of formal elections.

There was a diversity of views regarding whether the CNPA listens and the degree to which their leadership is accepted. The Act challenged the traditional authority of land based interests in the Park so resistance by these sectors is inevitable. Applying the 'Northern Ireland' criterion (the CNPA equally criticized by all sides) might illustrate if an appropriate balance has been struck. However, maintaining clear communication that explicitly identifies where the CNPA has listened to and acted on feedback remains essential.

The tension between transparency and inclusion versus delivering using a close-knit and trusted group of partners remains. Whilst the current arrangements are probably the best compromise with existing resources, it can favour 'business as usual' approaches due to the potential for 'group think' from the 'usual suspects'. Furthermore, perceptions of exclusion may hamper uptake of actions required by households, entrepreneurs or land managers to implement the next CNPP.

Individual commitment doesn't always translate into organisational commitment. Likewise, ensuring that representatives facilitate knowledge exchange within their organisations is dependent on the commitment, energy and status of the individual. The CNPA will have to work with different motivations held by their partners – maintaining these commitments within current financial constraints will remain a constant requirement.

## ***What next for our research?***

We hope to continue our relationship with the CNPA in two main ways using the new Scottish Government research programmes (2011- 2016). Firstly, looking at the implementation of an Ecosystem Approach in the Cairngorms as part of the research theme on Ecosystem Services; and secondly exploring urban-rural conflicts and synergies with regard to recreational use of the Angus Glens as part of the research theme on Vibrant Communities. For more information contact [Justin.Irvine@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Justin.Irvine@hutton.ac.uk) or [Katrina.Brown@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Katrina.Brown@hutton.ac.uk) respectively.

## Publications under development:

Blackstock K.L, Dinnie E and Dilley R. Enabling Authority – An Oxymoron? Evidence from the Cairngorms National Park for the *Journal of Rural Studies*, aiming for a 2012 submission.

## Publications to date:

**Blackstock, K.L.; Dinnie, E.; Trench, H.; Miles, G.,** (2011) Co-researching the Cairngorms: supporting the aims of, not just researching in, the Cairngorms National Park., *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 127, 40-60.

**Dinnie, E.; Blackstock, K.L.; Dilley, R.,** (In press) Landscapes of challenge and change: contested views of the Cairngorms National Park, *Landscape Research*.

Sustainable Tourism Indicators in Scotland: What should we be considering? **McCrum, G. S.; Blackstock, K.L.; Hunter, C.J.,** (2010) *Tourism Geographies*.

Multiple Understandings of the Cairngorms National Park: What should the Park deliver and for whom? **Blackstock K.L., Dilley R., Trench H. and Miles G** (2009) *Presentation to Rural Law Conference, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009*.

Measuring responsibility: an appraisal of a Scottish National Park's sustainable tourism indicators. **Blackstock, K.L.; White, V.; McCrum, G.; Scott, A.; Hunter, C.,** (2008) *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16, 276-297.

Clinging to, or captaining, the action research juggernaut? (Trying to) research partnership working in the Cairngorms National Park, Scotland., **Blackstock, K.L.; Dilley, R.,** (2008) *Presented within Towards Transformative Knowledges/Practices for Sustainable Rural Futures Session at the RGS -IBG Conference, Royal Geographical Society, London, 27 - 29th August 2008*.

Enabling or extractive: collaborative evaluation of partnership working?, **Blackstock, K.L.,** (2007) *Presented at the XXII Congress European Society for Rural Sociology, 20-24th August 2007*.

Associated outputs from the SMILE (Synergies in Multi-scale Inter-linkages of Eco-social Systems) project can be found at: <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/smile/documents.html>

Previous papers presented to the Board and the Strategy Group can be found at: <http://www.programme3.net/rural/rural38governanceSpacialPlanning.php>

**Figure One: The National Park Planning Structures**

