
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Path Sign Design Guidance

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Purpose: To update the Forum on development of a consistent approach to the design of path signs that meets Scottish Government guidance for core paths and to seek advice on the format of the guidance.

Advice sought:

The Forum is invited to give its advice on the following key elements of the path sign design guidance

- a) **Design guidance for path signs in the Cairngorms National Park should be recognised as a ‘local format’ by all public agencies providing funds for path signs.**
- b) **The designs for the Cairngorms ‘local format’ should be prescriptive using the key elements of national best practice and the areas of consensus from the workshop to produce detailed designs templates. Such designs will contain high contrast lettering of a standard font of set sizes, and outside urban situations be made of wood (locally sourced where possible) etc. Importantly, any design must be able to be made by a range of manufacturers.**
- c) **In addition the design guidance should provide a short section of advice on the key design elements that make up an effective path sign for those who wish to develop their own suite of signs without the support of public funds.**

Background

1. In February 2008 the Forum advised that the approach and the principles for developing design guidelines for path signs being used by CNPA were appropriate.
2. In April 2008 sixteen representatives from land managers, path groups and national organisations attended a workshop, facilitated by ‘Walking the Talk’, to discuss the key issues. A brief workshop report has been produced and circulated to all those invited to the workshop. A copy is available to Forum Members on request.

Workshop Outputs

3. There was general recognition that signage needs to be planned in advanced (rather than ad-hoc) and that the CNPA could have a coordinating role through the planning process and access officers. Communities can have input to this process and there may be scope for the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust to facilitate planning and development of signs.
4. In general, the coherent use of signs was seen as a positive thing for visitors / path users and that there was a possibility of instilling a sense of place by appropriate use of signs.

5. It was agreed that branding is a sensitive issue and that there are conflicting 'needs' for different organisations. Some wanted to retain the option to brand signs and others recognised that the visitor should come first. It was also recognised that directional signs have a specific function and that there are other places to communicate messages to the user about where they are, who manages the path, who paid for the infrastructure and how to behave.
6. It was suggested that the guidance could be used to ensure that there is a clear expectation of what public money will 'purchase'.
7. When it came to looking at specific design issues the following appeared as areas of consensus:
 - Use of high quality, sustainable, local materials was important
 - One design was unlikely to fit all locations
 - Signs can affect a sense of place and should be located sensitively and not prolifically
 - Use of path names was such as 'Jock's Road' was considered to have many benefits and give local character to paths. It also provided the opportunity to use Gaelic and other local dialects.
 - Use of high contrast font in nationally approved minimum sizes was a standard requirement.
 - Distance should be in miles and with the unit stated e.g. '3 miles'.
 - Recommended users should appear at the trail head not the directional sign e.g. 'suitable for wheelchair users'.
 - Any branding should be relevant to the user not the brander
 - Any branding should not be about 'logos' but about promoting the quality of the experience.
 - There are lots of other places to brand so keeping signs free of clutter is good for the user.
8. However, when the discussion looked at specific design guidance the areas where there were diverging opinions led some participants to suggest that the guidance should be broad allowing local variation in design within a range of best practice. Some participants considered that this would allow land managers and path groups to develop their own 'suite' of Cairngorms path signs.

Discussion

9. It has been shown that the current range of path signs across the National Park does not meet current best practice as defined by Scottish Government and when viewed collectively presents inconsistent information to the user.
10. It is likely that the majority of new directional path signs, particularly those on core paths, will be installed with the support of public funds and we have the opportunity to link such funding to the use of standard designs.
11. Current guidance for path signs forming part of land management contracts (see below) is prescriptive in some areas but gives freedom of choice in other areas that conflict with the consensus at the recent workshop e.g. use of metal and recycled plastic. However, this guidance does provide scope for the development of a Cairngorms format and we recommend that the design guidance that we produce forms such a 'local format' for all public agencies providing funds for path signs in the National Park.

Technical Specifications for Path Signs forming part of Land Management Contracts

- All paths must be clearly signposted at entrance points with a fingerpost showing the word 'Path', pointing the way, and if appropriate specifying a destination and the distance to that destination or a significant point.
- If the starting point of the path is not at the public road, the path must be signposted from that public road with a threshold signpost. If the path for which you are applying is a continuation of a path on a neighbouring holding, you may need to liaise with your neighbour about signposting it from the public road. Way-markers must be at places along the path that helps users to keep to the route.
- Direction signs and fingerposts must be constructed of timber, metal or recycled plastic. The posts must be 2.1m high and stable, ideally use timber posts 100mm square. Text, in a plain font of a minimum text height of 30mm must appear on both sides of the blade.
- Waymarkers, if timber, must be at least 75 mm square, treated and routed and they can be set in concrete if required.
- **Where there is a recognised local format for signs or waymarkers this can be used with the agreement of your local access officer.**

12. In producing design guidance we are faced with the dilemma of how prescriptive? A number attending the workshop clearly wanted freedom to produce their own designs within a broader framework. However, we are concerned that while this may improve the current sign situation it will still leave wide scope for inconsistency.
13. The first principle agreed in this work was that signs should primarily look to the needs of people using the path and we feel that this is best achieved by producing path signs that are instantly recognised a such across the National Park (a common design) and clearly provide the information necessary to use the path. This is best exemplified by the simple design used on directional road signs.
14. We consider that interpretation, path condition, recommended use, land management/path care branding and local distinctiveness are best left to trail head boards, maps, leaflets, websites and other installations such as threshold signs and public art.
15. This leads us to recommend developing guidance for path signs in the National Park, funded by the public sector, which is prescriptive with the guidelines using key elements of national best practice and the areas of consensus from the workshop to produce detailed design templates. Such designs will contain high contrast lettering of a standard font of set sizes, and outside urban situations be made of wood (locally sourced where possible) etc. Importantly, any design must be able to be made by a range of manufactures.
16. However, we also feel that it is important to provide advice on best practice for those who wish to produce signs without public support and therefore we recommend that the guidance also contains a short section on the key design elements that make up an effective path sign.

17. Detailed guidance will be presented at the next meeting of the Forum in August.
18. The Forum is invited to give advice on the points noted above.

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