
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: National Park Plan Development – Emerging Structure and Themes

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Purpose

To update the Board on engagement with partners and communities to develop the next National Park Plan and to seek agreement to the emerging structure and themes.

Recommendation

That the Board consider and agree the emerging structure and themes for the plan as the basis for development of the draft.

Executive Summary

The National Park Plan is the key tool for setting out the management approach to achieve the four aims of the Park collectively and in a co-ordinated way. Co-ordinating its preparation and delivery is one of CNPA's primary responsibilities and lies at the heart of our relationships with partners. Its role in providing strategic context and direction for the Local Development Plan means that we are preparing and consulting on appropriate stages of the two plans together. Public consultation on the draft National Park Plan and the Main Issues Report for the Local Development Plan is scheduled for June-September 2011.

The initial phase of informal engagement with partners and communities over the last 6 months has led to an emerging structure for the plan and key themes. The proposed structure seeks to set out clearly the appropriate level of policy guidance, including the national context of the National Park designation as well as more spatial guidance to guide ongoing management of the Cairngorms National Park. It goes on to identify specific 5-year outcomes to direct effort towards particular changes we want to see in the Park by 2017, in three broad themes, and identifying priority projects that will help to take us there. This section will be crucial to identifying the contributions of partners. The proposed structure then concludes by identifying other areas of business in which we can collectively do things better and more effectively, and identifying the key implementation, monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Feedback and agreement on this working structure is sought in order to further develop the draft plan for input from members and partners over the coming four months, prior to finalising the draft for consultation in May.

NATIONAL PARK PLAN DEVELOPMENT – EMERGING STRUCTURE AND THEMES - FOR DECISION

Background

1. The current National Park Plan runs until March 2012. In line with the National Parks (Scotland) Act we have begun the process to review and prepare a National Park Plan for the period 2012-17.
2. The National Park Plan is the strategic management plan to guide all aspects of managing the National Park. It is at the heart of CNPA's role to engage others and ensure the collective and co-ordinated delivery of the aims of the Park. Therefore the approach to its preparation and structure is as important as the detailed content – the process of developing the plan is key to building on the partnerships already established and developing other relationships needed.
3. In March 2010 the Board agreed the approach to developing the next plan including engagement with communities and partner organisations, and an initial framework with which to begin these discussions. This paper brings the process up to date in the light of these discussions with communities and partners and sets out a fuller structure for the plan that is emerging from these discussions.

Lessons from the first National Park Plan

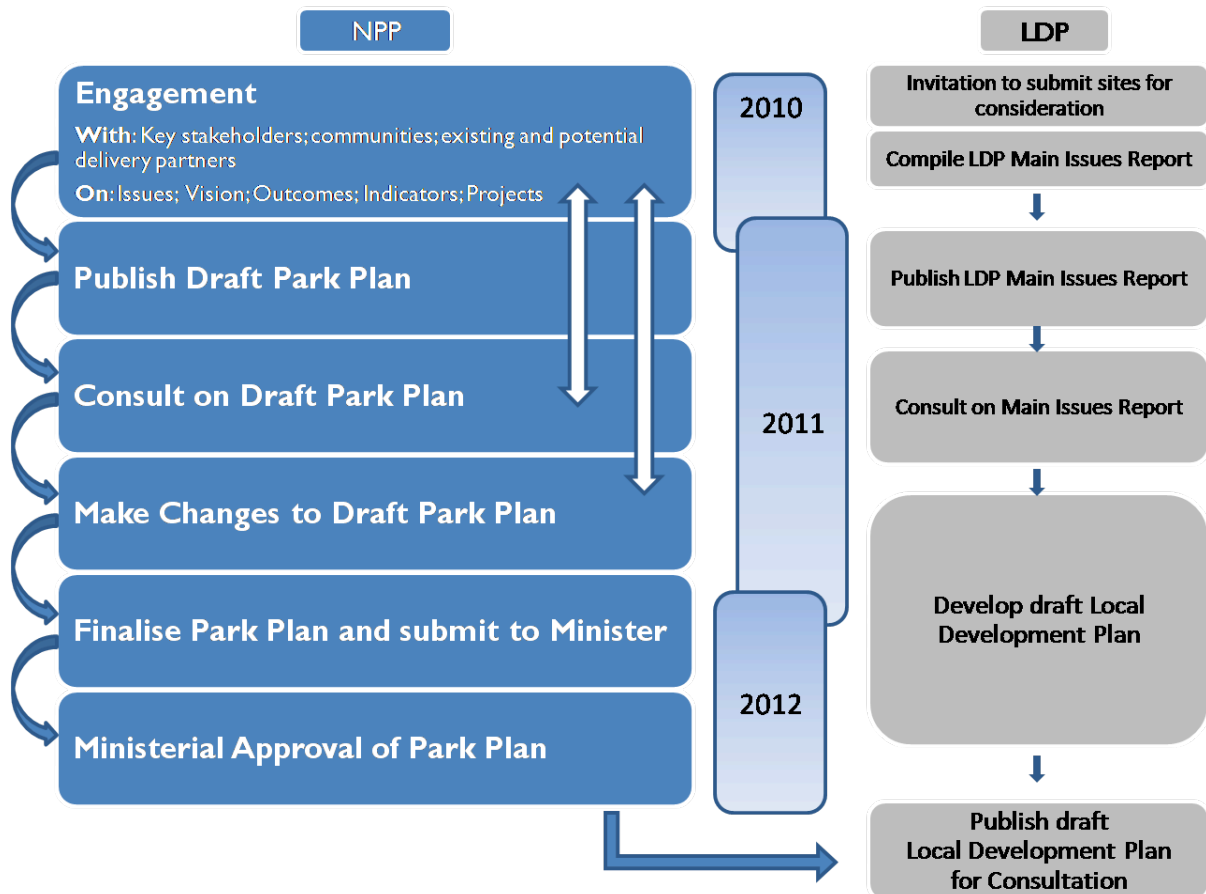
4. In developing and implementing the current National Park Plan, we have learnt a lot about the process, how we engage stakeholders, work with partners, maintain motivation and demonstrate progress. Over this period we have been fortunate to have ongoing feedback from Kirsty Blackstock of the Macaulay Institute, who has been carrying out a Scottish Government funded research project examining the preparation and implementation of the first Cairngorms National Park Plan.
5. Key themes from previous workshops reflecting on the research findings include:
 - a) the distinction between different stakeholders and their motivations – partners, communities and people living in the Park, communities of interest;
 - b) the need to minimise duplication of engagement and consultation on the Park Plan and other plans or initiatives;
 - c) using existing evidence and structures such as the community planning process
 - d) the need to provide clear terms of reference for different stakeholders – setting out the process, what they can get from it and how they can get it;
 - e) engaging on issues that are real to each stakeholder;
 - f) providing honest and direct feedback;
 - g) be transparent about the roles that delivery partners have in the final Park Plan and on the nature and scale of change that can be achieved.
 - h) making stronger and explicit links between implementation of the Park Plan and Single Outcome Agreements
6. The wider context has of course also changed significantly. The current and ongoing financial constraints in the public sector should reinforce the opportunity that the

collective approach to managing the Park offers to partners. Through the National Park Plan we should seek to achieve our common objectives more efficiently, pool limited resources and play to the strengths of each partner. This should be an underlying theme of our engagement with partners through the development of the plan.

Timetable and Process

7. A key starting point for the process and timetable is the close connection between preparation of the National Park Plan and the Local Development Plan. We know, following the Local Plan Inquiry, that there needs to be more explicit connection between the two plans and we have significant clarity of the strategic role of the National Park Plan in setting the direction and rationale for the Local Development Plan. Bearing in mind the lesson referred to above about minimising multiple consultations, we took an early decision to consult on the draft National Park Plan and the Main Issues Report for the Local Development Plan at the same time in 2011.
8. This will allow people to see the issues for the Local Development Plan in the wider strategic context, helping to place debates on development in the bigger picture of the Park's management and aims. It should also lead to greater connection between the two plans and a clear and transparent way in which issues of strategy or detail can be directed to the appropriate plan.
9. Once the National Park Plan is approved by Ministers, it will then provide the certainty of strategic direction to allow the draft Local Development Plan to be published in 2012.

Figure 1: Development of the National Park Plan & Local Development Plan



Engagement and Consultation

10. The emerging structure and content of the plan is informed by discussion with key partners and community engagement carried out over the last six months. This informal stage of engagement is designed to help identify the issues and draw partners together around the priorities and opportunities. Discussions have taken place through delivery teams, forums and on a one-to-one basis with key partners. Paper 5 provides a summary of the community engagement and highlights key themes emerging from the first phase.
11. It is part of the role of the CNPA and the National Park Plan to bring together the local and national aspirations and objectives for this area into a coherent and appropriate management approach. The two streams of engagement so far provide good and targeted input as well as transparent evidence on which to base policy directions. In developing both the National Park Plan and the Local Development Plan we will be able to show how the aspirations of local communities, set out in their community visions, can be taken forward in the more strategic national context.
12. Further engagement to inform development of the draft plan is planned over the coming three months. This will develop the initial ideas from communities and partners into firmer proposals for policy and action, helping to develop the draft plan and identify more specifically what particular partners will contribute to its delivery.

We anticipate that engagement will continue to run throughout the process, during the formal public consultation and after, to develop and refine the content of the plan and commitments from partners.

Proposed Structure of Draft National Park Plan

13. Discussions with the Scottish Government, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and our delivery partners in the Cairngorms National Park have led to the emerging structure for the plan set out below. This remains open to further development and feedback on the structure at this stage will help develop the draft.
14. We propose to prepare a draft plan that has a discursive element to it – ie it will include some key questions we want to ask respondents and set out some of the significant options/alternative approaches that are open to us. That is also a requirement of the strategic environmental assessment which we intend to use to help identify and discuss alternatives. In this way, the draft is not intended to be a ‘take it or leave it’ draft of what the final plan will look like, but an open draft that seeks to engage people in developing it further.
15. The key sections of the plan proposed and their likely purpose and content is set out below for discussion.

National Parks in Scotland

16. An introductory section that is common to National Park Plans for both the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Parks to set a clear national context for the National Park designation including:
 - a) What National Parks deliver for Scotland
 - b) National Park aims
 - c) Role and purpose of National Park Plans
 - d) Role and purpose of National Park Authorities
 - e) Role of other bodies in relation to National Parks
 - f) What the National Park designation means in the national context of protected areas
 - g) The opportunity to develop and trial innovative approaches in National Parks
 - h) Contribution of National Parks to Scottish Government outcomes
 - i) Context of National Performance Framework and Single Outcome Agreements

Vision for the Cairngorms National Park

17. The current vision would stand as it is, but this is an opportunity to adjust or re-present the vision if appropriate – for example to develop a more succinct statement. The inclusion of long-term outcomes associated with the current vision is a useful reference point against which to judge management choices and we propose to retain these, perhaps updated or refreshed where necessary.

Land Use Strategy for the Cairngorms National Park

18. This section will set out the spatial strategy for managing the Park. It will show explicitly how the principles of the Scottish Government’s Land Use Strategy, alongside the National Planning Framework, will be implemented in the Park. This

section will be a key part of the strategic direction and context for the Local Development Plan.

19. In developing the first National Park Plan we took a decision not to set out a spatial approach, principally because we were focused on encouraging others to think in terms of the Park as a whole, but also because at that stage we lacked sufficient evidence and data on which to plan spatially. Now, however, it seems natural to set out a more spatial framework for management and to recognise explicitly that there are particular management needs in specific areas of the Park.
20. We do not propose to zone the Park, or to set out prescriptive policies for specific areas. Rather, we propose to set out key spatial information that should influence management and identify particular areas of focus, for example for visitor and recreation management.
21. The section will include:
 - a) Principles/objectives for sustainable land use and settlement strategy
 - b) Summary of the special qualities
 - c) Analysis of principle habitat types, associated benefits, threats and opportunities (applying the principles of an ecosystems approach in practice)
 - d) Maps with associated objectives - eg wildness, soils, woodland habitat network
 - e) Settlement strategy (maps showing settlement hierarchy, regional context etc)

Five Year Outcomes and Strategic Objectives – key themes for the Cairngorms National Park

22. This section will set out a set of five year outcomes, targets and indicators that provide the focus for implementation. It will also set out the role of specific partners in delivering these outcomes and some commentary on the approach.
23. Three key themes are emerging from discussions with partners:
 - a) *Conserving and Enhancing the Special Qualities* - identifying the conservation, changes and enhancement we collectively want to make in relation to the natural and cultural heritage of the Park. Likely areas of focus include enhancing habitat networks, woodland expansion, conserving and enhancing wildness, engaging people in natural and cultural heritage and influencing land management practice.
 - b) *Towards a Low Carbon National Park* – identifying the focus for collective effort to move to a low carbon economy and the specific changes sought over five years. Likely areas of focus are those in which the National Park can make a difference, such as land use, food and drink, household energy efficiency, settlement design and infrastructure.
 - c) *Creating a Sustainable Destination* – identifying the changes sought to improve the Park's performance as a sustainable destination – embedding the principles of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in the management of the Park. Likely areas of focus include enhancing the visitor experience, connecting the visitor experience with the special qualities and securing high service and environmental standards in tourism.

Priority Projects

24. This section will set out a suite of headline projects that will make a significant contribution to achieving the five year outcomes. Whilst we do not want to include a long list of activities in the Park Plan, identifying a few big projects is an effective way in which to draw in partner commitment and give a clear sense of what will be delivered. The projects are likely to deliver across the three themes to varying degrees, emphasising the co-ordinated delivery of the aims. Examples emerging so far include:
- a) Landscape-scale habitat enhancement
 - b) Local Biodiversity Action Plan delivery
 - c) Low carbon energy generation and use
 - d) Food for Life
 - e) Sustainable Design
 - f) Land management support
 - g) Enhancing tourist routes
 - h) Sustainable Tourism Strategy delivery

Better Business as Usual

25. This section will identify the good things already happening and important areas of ongoing work that can be better or more effective. These are areas of work that do not in themselves need to be headline themes or projects, but are vital to the good management of the Park. These are likely to include, for example:
- a) Community Planning
 - b) Planning service improvement and associated 'better regulation'
 - c) Delivery of affordable housing
 - d) Sustainable deer management – building on the successful focus of NPP I
 - e) Core Paths management
 - f) Developing the Cairngorms Business Partnership
 - g) Management of designated sites
 - h) Delivery of LEADER
 - i) Co-ordination of research

Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting

26. This section will set out the approach to implementation, summarise the range of mechanisms – working through existing partnership mechanisms as far as possible – and set out how delivery will be monitored and reported.

Policy Context

27. The development of the new National Park Plan provides an opportunity to take account of new policy drivers and changes and to set out a clear policy direction for the management of the Park. It also gives an opportunity to set out a clearer sense of what National Parks deliver for Scotland and the national context of the designation. Through close working with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, the common set of messages on Scotland's National Parks to be used in both National Park Plans should help to address a lack of national policy in relation to National Parks.
28. The Scottish Government's national performance framework also provides a useful context and common language in which to show how outcomes from our approach

to managing the Park deliver wider benefits regionally and nationally. We are already working closely with local authority partners to make a step change in the way in which the National Park Plan is embedded within community planning approaches, to make deliver more efficient and effective.

Implications

Financial Implications

29. There are no direct financial implications arising from consideration of this paper. Budget for partner and community engagement and publication of the draft plan is included within the current and draft operational plans for this year and next.

Presentational Implications

30. Development of the National Park Plan is at the heart of CNPA's relationship with partners and stakeholders and gives us an opportunity to revisit key issues and relationships in a constructive way. Both board members and staff have a key role to play in helping to communicate the opportunity that the National Park Plan presents – to do things differently, better and in a smarter way. Having focused on delivery for a period, this is an opportunity to revisit some of the bigger questions about what people expect from a National Park and what in particular should be the priorities in the Cairngorms.

Implications for Stakeholders

31. We have already engaged a range of partners in early thinking to develop the plan and will continue to engage as the draft develops and is then made available for consultation. While there is a clear responsibility on CNPA to lead and prompt, there is also a responsibility on our partners to respond to the opportunity that the plan presents and to consider how they could make use of the National Park to do things differently, better or in a more efficient way. Our engagement and consultation approach needs to emphasise this opportunity and make it as easy as possible for partners to see how they can make the Park work for them.

Next Steps

32. Development of the draft plan for consultation is underway, with further engagement with partners ongoing. Key milestones include:

4 th March	Planning committee consideration of key issues for the LDP Main Issue Report
18 th March	Board consideration of NPP 5 year outcomes and priority projects; and draft LDP Main Issues Report
15 th April	Informal Board discussion on draft NPP
13 th May	Board consideration of draft NPP – approval for consultation
June - Sept	Public consultation on draft NPP and LDP Main Issues Report

33. There is scope for further informal working sessions between these milestones should members wish.

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