CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: **Approval of Draft Core Paths Plan for Consultation**

Prepared by: **Bob Grant, Senior Outdoor Access Officer**
                 Sandra Middleton, Outdoor Access Officer

Purpose

This paper summarises the progress made to date on developing a Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park and builds on the discussion at the recent joint workshop for the Board and Local Outdoor Access Forum. The paper provides costed options for a proposed core paths network and seeks the Board's approval on the most appropriate network for inclusion in the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan which will be subject to a public consultation exercise.

Recommendations

That the Board:
   a) note the progress made to date in developing an Interim Draft Core Paths Plan;
   b) approve the aim for the Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park;
   c) considers the options presented and approves Option 2 as the basis for the development of the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan for public consultation; and
   d) approves the inclusion of the River Spey as a proposed core path within the Interim draft Core Paths Plan.

Executive Summary

This paper explains the approach used in developing and identifying a network of core paths for the Cairngorms National Park and the principles behind two options for potential core paths networks. The first option identifies a basic framework of routes which will meet the legal requirement of core paths planning. The second option provides for a more extensive network which would meet both the legal requirement and also contribute towards delivery of the wider objectives of the National Park Plan. The paper also proposes that the River Spey be included in the next round of consultation as a proposed core path.

APPROVAL OF INTERIM DRAFT CORE PATHS PLAN FOR CONSULTATION – FOR DECISION

Background

1. The National Park Plan recognises the importance of the existing path network and identifies as part of one of the Priorities for Action the need to bring the current good quality of outdoor access opportunities up to the excellent standard that is expected in a National Park over the next five years. The preparation of the Core Paths Plan is a key mechanism which will contribute to achieving the Outcomes for this Priority for Action.

2. The preparation of a Core Paths Plan is also a statutory obligation placed on both National Park Authorities and on the 32 local authorities in Scotland by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The aspiration is that the process will lead, in time, to a widespread and highly visible network of paths across Scotland that are easy and attractive to use. Most core paths will probably be located on the lower ground and there will be especially good provision close to communities. The benefits of the new and positively managed path networks will contribute to a number of the wider Scottish Executive targets relating to improved health, physical activity, social inclusion and minimisation of carbon emissions to mitigate against climate change. Core paths will have an important role in ensuring that people can easily experience the special qualities of the Park.

3. Therefore the first test which the network of core paths will have to satisfy, as set out in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 ("the Act"), is: "Is the proposed network of paths sufficient to give the public reasonable access throughout the National Park?" Looking to the implementation of the National Park Plan, the critical test is: "Is the proposed network of paths sufficient to achieve the Outcomes identified in the relevant Priority for Action? **(Annex 1)"**

4. It is important to understand the stage we have reached in the core paths planning process and the work that lies ahead. The project plan was approved by the Board on 7 April 2006. A Steering Group was convened comprising members of the Board and the Local Outdoor Access Forum. A formal project management approach has been adopted, taking account of Guidance from the Scottish Executive and using the best practice model promoted by Paths for All Partnership and SNH. A Cross Border Working Group was established to facilitate discussion of the issues with adjacent local authorities. The work that CNPA has undertaken to date is described in the next section of the paper.

5. Looking to the future there will be two key intermediate stages before the Core Paths Plan is adopted; the first will be preparation of an Interim Draft Plan which will be subject to an informal public consultation (as described below). The second stage will result in a Draft Plan which will be submitted to Scottish Ministers and will then be the subject of a formal public consultation under the terms of the Act. The Core Paths

Plan will then be adopted after taking into account any representations and objections and, if necessary, holding a Public Inquiry.

Gathering Information on the Existing Path Network and the Needs and Aspirations of the Public

6.   During September, October and November 2006 the CNPA ran 25 events aimed at engaging the communities of place and communities of interest (including land managers, visitors and recreational user groups) in the core paths planning process. The aim was to find out what paths people value and why, what they use the network for and what are their concerns. Questionnaires and maps were used to record information about different areas in the National Park and were made available to participants at the events and were also available to download from the CNPA website.

7.   Overall, approximately 560 people were directly involved and we received 568 completed questionnaires. The questionnaires also produced some demographic information which has proved useful in analysing how effectively the engagement process worked. Feedback reports detailing the way in which each community and community of interest could get involved in the process and the views they expressed are available on the CNPA website. An overall summary of these reports is provided in **Annex 2**.

8.   The events provided a good opportunity to speak to people about core paths planning and to manage their expectations in relation to what can be achieved through it, particularly in relation to the cost implications of new path build and upgrade. Maintenance of existing paths was a frequently raised issue and the events provided an opportunity to clarify the duties of the CNPA in overall management of the network. It was stressed that there is no specific duty on CNPA arising from the legislation to maintain the paths and, as such, a partnership approach will be required. In addition, the events allowed a thorough debate on the desirability, or otherwise, of the network extending into or through the mountainous or wilder areas.

Aim for the Core Paths Plan in the National Park

9.   To provide a clear sense of purpose an aim has been developed for the Core Paths Plan in the National Park. The aim takes into account the legal requirements, guidance from the Scottish Executive and a link to the overarching National Park Plan. The aim of the Core Paths Plan in the National Park is:

"The Core Paths Plan will identify a network of paths. This network will be sufficient to meet the needs of residents and visitors by providing a range of high quality outdoor access opportunities in the National Park and which help people to enjoy and understand the Park's special qualities. Core paths will be clearly promoted and provide for a wide range of activities and users, connecting them to local services, public transport links and to a wider network of paths in the Park. The

Plan will assist the National Park Authority in the effective overall management of the network".

10. **It is recommended that the Board approve the aim for the Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park.**

Developing Criteria for Selecting Core Paths

11. The Outdoor Access Audit, which was completed in 2005 in preparation of the Outdoor Access Strategy, demonstrated that there is considerable variability throughout the area in the availability and quality of paths. For example, some communities have excellent promoted path networks while others have almost none. In addition, some of the path networks are well maintained and looked after while others are neglected or suffering from lack of maintenance. To address this issue several Action Areas were identified within the draft Outdoor Access Strategy, as shown in **Figure 1,** each with different priorities for the next five year period.

12. The initial analysis of the questionnaires and comments made during the recent Core Paths Plan engagement process supports these findings and has established that "one size will not fit all" with regard to a Core Paths Plan. There is clearly a need to develop a selection process that recognises the different needs in different areas of the National Park.   To do this effectively and robustly an initial set of selection criteria was developed and discussed at a workshop on 16 January involving members of the Board and Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum.

Figure 1. Action Areas from the Outdoor Access Strategy
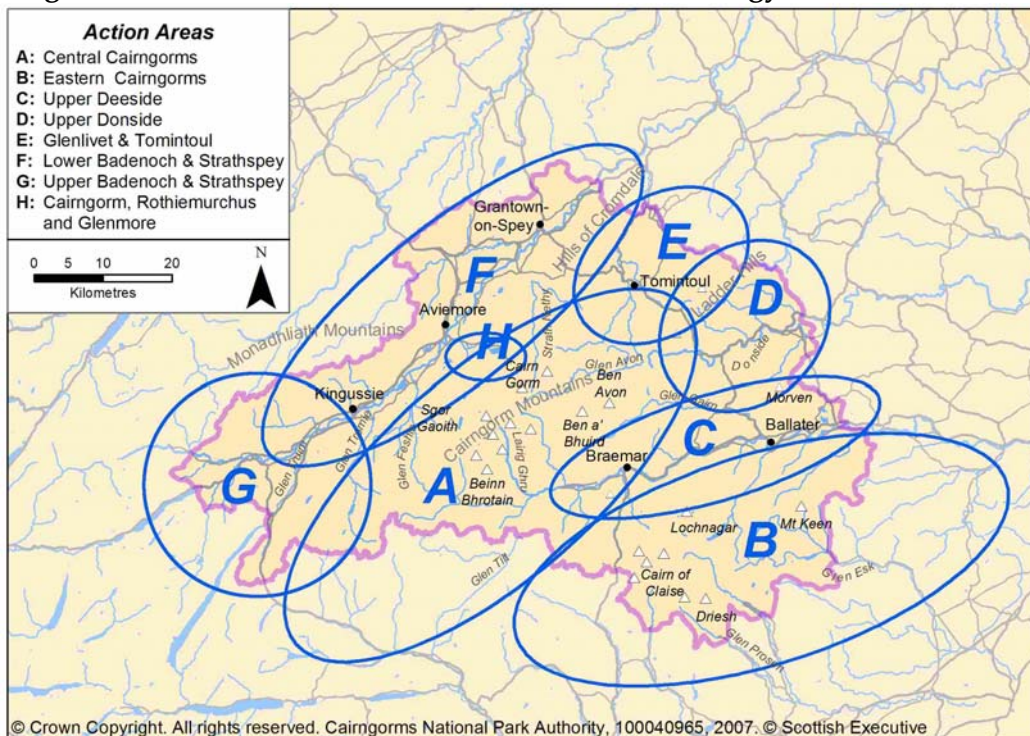
13.   To assist in the discussions at the workshop, a potential core paths network was developed for Action Area G (Upper Badenoch and Strathspey). The discussion at the workshop broadly supported a process that initially evaluates individual paths and then applies broader criteria across the network in each of the eight Action Areas. A number of suggestions and proposals were made at the workshop and these have resulted in a refined selection methodology for the network (as shown in **Annex 3)**.

14.   In summary, the proposed core paths network will be identified using a four stage approach. The first stage will assess the individual paths identified through engagement with the public to identify those paths with highest demand which are close to settlements and those which may present an issue in relation to the natural and cultural heritage. The second stage will then select paths which will make up the proposed core paths network based on this information and using criteria which reflect the aim of the Core Paths Plan.

15.   Many of the existing promoted paths in the area (as defined in the Outdoor Access Audit as, "routes which are signposted throughout their length and promoted in associated visitor information facilities or leaflets.") will already have been included in the core paths network at Stage 2. Stage 3 will allow for all remaining promoted paths which have not yet been identified at Stage 2 to be included in the core paths network. The fourth and final stage will be to assess the sufficiency and affordability of the proposed network as a whole.

16.   There is clearly a degree of variation possible in relation to what can be termed 'sufficient' (from the Act) and it is recognised that there are differing views from a number of quarters to what should be the overall extent of a core paths network. A number of the concerns raised relate to potential costs: both for initial capital works and on-going maintenance. To address these issues and to assist the Board in determining the optimum network for the Park, two options have been devised, as described below:

   a) **Option 1 – a basic core paths network**
      This network of paths would be the minimum required to satisfy the legal requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This network would be selected using only Stages 1, 2 and 4 of the proposed methodology (**Annex 3**) and, as such, would not include all existing promoted paths. Most of the paths which would be in Option 1 are already present on the ground with only relatively small sections requiring to be upgraded or built. An example of how this network might look for the Upper Deeside area is shown on **Map 1**.

   b) **Option 2 – a more extensive core paths network**
      This network of paths goes beyond Option 1 so that it would also contribute towards delivery of the five year Outcomes from the National Park Plan. This network would be selected by using all 4 Stages in the proposed methodology (**Annex 2**) and, as such, would include all low ground routes that are currently promoted through leaflets and signposting as defined in the Outdoor Access

Audit.   This option recognises that much of the existing promoted path network in the National Park has been developed as a result of demands from residents or visitors – these paths have already been valued as important and considerable time and effort has already gone into their development. A higher proportion of the paths in the total proposed network (than in Option 1) are already present on the ground with only relatively small sections requiring to be upgraded or built from scratch. An example of how this option might look for the Upper Deeside area is shown on **Map 2**.

Cost of the Options

17.   Before evaluation of the two options it is worth considering further the costs involved. The Guidance from the Scottish Executive makes clear that access authorities should use their powers,"…for the effective overall management of the core paths network". The management functions include keeping accurate records on core paths and their infrastructure; ensuring core paths mapping is accurate and kept up to date and available; maintaining contact details of relevant land mangers; monitoring requirements for removal of obstructions; re-instatement after ploughing and managing inspection records. The Park Authority is also required to supply information about the core paths network as part of the Scottish Executive's monitoring requirements.

18.   Whilst there is no specific duty for the Park Authority to maintain the whole of the core paths network, if the Outcomes of the Park Plan are to be achieved it will be important that the network is well maintained and easy to use. An effective partnership will be required between whoever manages the land, public bodies and others to ensure that this happens. The Park Authority will be the lead public body in making sure that this work takes place but the Park Authority is unlikely to be able to fund all necessary maintenance on every path. It is likely that a range of imaginative solutions will need to be found, depending on local circumstances.

19.   Much of the existing extensive network of promoted paths is already maintained by a variety of means, for example:
   a) individual land managers – either funded privately or through support mechanisms such as Land Management Contracts, management agreements or grants;
   b) public bodies who maintain paths on their own land (e.g. Forest Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage);
   c) non-governmental organisations – funding work through their own membership subscriptions or Lottery supported schemes (e.g. National Trust for Scotland or RSPB);
   d) community bodies who rely on volunteers, path sponsorship schemes and grants to maintain their own networks;
   e) Trusts (e.g. the Upper Deeside Access Trust) who have developed very successful programmes to upgrade and maintain paths using funds from a variety of sources.

20.   The Park Authority spent £330,114 in the 2005/06 financial year on access infrastructure, management and maintenance. This sum was by way of a contribution towards some large projects which included the Deeside Way, Inverdruie cycling lane, the Bachnagairn path and the management of the Speyside Way. The total value of these projects amounts to £766,860 and our contribution was 43% of the overall costs. It is reasonable to anticipate that future capital works would attract a similar degree of partnership funding.

21.   It has not been possible in the time available to work up full cost estimates for each of the two options but the following figures provide an indication of the levels of costs that are likely to be incurred. The costs for Option 2 are based on a 'worst case scenario' where all existing way-marking and signposts would require replacement – in reality this may not be the case.

Table 1: Capital Cost estimates for Option 1 and 2

	Option 1		Option 2	
	Total Cost £'000s	**Anticipated CNPA contribution (43%)**	**Total Costs** £'000s	**Anticipated CNPA contribution (43%)**
Capital Works (for new paths and upgrades)	750	322	750	322
Signposting & Way-marking	24	10	45	19
Associated promotion through leaflets and websites, etc.	57	24	57	24
TOTAL (capital costs)	**831**	**357**	**852**	**366**

Table 2: Maintenance Cost estimates for Option 1 and 2

	Option 1		Option 2	
	Total Cost £'000s	**Anticipated CNPA contribution (50%)**	**Total Costs** £'000s	**Anticipated CNPA contribution (50%)**
Annual Maintenance	38	19	129	64.5

22.   The cost estimates have been based on the following assumptions:
   a) Capital costs calculated @ £25 per metre for high specification new build path and £10 per metre for low specification new build/upgrade path plus a sum for bridge construction/repair of two bridges close to communities
   b) Fingerpost signs costs calculated @ £150 per sign and way-marker posts costs calculated @ £40 per post and estimate made for one community network multiplied by number of communities
   c) Promotional material costs calculated @ £3,000 per community for five years

d) Annual maintenance costs calculated @ 20p per metre for the path network as a whole

e) Maintenance funded over the whole network by mechanisms described in paragraph 18 with a potential overall contribution amounting to 50% of total costs.

Evaluation of the Options

23. A summary of advantages and disadvantages of the two options is presented in **Annex 4.** Both options have the potential to satisfy the requirements of the Land Reform Act. If the development of a core paths network was to be undertaken in isolation from other work within the National Park, then Option 1 would be the best option to select. However, Option 1 fails to satisfactorily contribute to the wider goals within the relevant Priority for Action in the Park Plan. Option 2 has considerable further advantages and would provide the closest fit with the expectations of a National Park.

24. In making a decision about the two options it is important to note that the Board are not being asked to make a firm financial commitment at this stage. Resource allocation will take place in the normal way though the preparation of the next Corporate Plan. Whichever option is chosen it may not be realistic to expect that resources can be found to fund all of the necessary capital works within the 2 year timescale that is required for the Core Paths Plan and it would be more realistic to phase the work required over a 5 year period. Only those capital works that can realistically be delivered within the 2 year timescale would be included within the adopted Core Paths Plan while those that cannot be achieved in that timescale would be identified as aspirational paths.

25. Such paths would be high priorities for new capital investment and the work required could perhaps be carried out by the proposed Outdoor Access Trust that is to be the subject of a Board Paper in April. If there is a sufficient degree of partnership support it should be possible to undertake the works in time for inclusion in a subsequent review of the Core Paths Plan in 5 years time. This is in line with Scottish Executive guidance on developing a Core Paths Plan and this timescale would tie in with the 5 year timescale identified within the Park Plan.

26. **It is recommended that the Board considers the options presented and approves Option 2 as the basis for the development of the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan for public consultation.**

Core Paths on Water

27. Core paths can be designated on water and the test for "sufficiency" must therefore include rivers and water users. The community engagement exercise showed that the River Spey is a popular place for water activities with many residents and

visitors. The river already has a right of navigation over its length (confirmed by the House of Lords) and is one of the most important rivers in Scotland for kayaking and canoeing. It is of particular value for multi day-touring trips.

28.   The river is of course also very highly valued by fishermen and provides employment and a considerable income stream for a range of businesses associated with the fishing industry. The need for both fishermen and paddlers to share this resource has been recognised for some time. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code provides very useful guidance and an annual Spey River Users meeting provides an opportunity to discuss issues and find common solutions to problems. In general, although there are tensions from time to time, there are good working relations on the river.

29.   While other rivers were highlighted during the community engagement exercise, the case for including them in the Plan as proposed core paths is not compelling. No other rivers have attracted the level of support engendered by the Spey.

30.   In taking forward this proposal through the next consultation there would need to be considerable further discussion, particularly with the relevant land managers and fisheries interests. There will also need to be further work undertaken with each of the two relevant local authorities (Highland and Moray Council) and, as the Spey is designated as a Special Area of Conservation, further consideration of Natura issues.

31.   **It is recommended that the Board approves the inclusion of the River Spey as a proposed core path within the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan.**

Policy Context

32.   **Delivering Sustainability –** The Plan will help to 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. A good path 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.

33.   **Delivering a Park for All –** Core paths must meet the needs of residents and visitors. As such they should 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. By engaging local communities early in the identification of core paths, it is hoped that they will wish to become involved in actively managing the paths network in partnership with CNPA and land managers.

34.   **Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency -** 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

35.   The Board are not being asked to make any firm commitments for expenditure at this stage but clearly it is important to consider the overall likely costs of managing the network at this stage. The estimated costs associated with implementing the Core Paths Plan are shown in Figure 1 and discussed above. The capital element is unlikely to be affordable within a single year and it is proposed that the capital works are taken forward with partners over a 5 year period.

Presentational Implications

36.   A similar programme of communication will be developed for the next round of public consultation to ensure that a wide spectrum of path users and land managers are able to present their views on the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan.

37.   Expectations have been managed through the community engagement process but it is acknowledged that only a very small percentage of potential path users attended any of these meetings. There will be an expectation that the Park Authority is able to make a difference to the existing network. Providing recognition of the value of promoted path networks adjacent to communities will help manage any residual concerns that they are not being repaired immediately. The need to stress the timescales involved in pulling together partnership funding for large projects will be part of managing these expectations.

Implications for Stakeholders

38.   The main stakeholders are the land managers, the residents and visitors who will use the core paths network when it is approved and implemented. In practice, it is clear that much of the path network already exists but the need to promote and signpost the paths will ensure that the network links effectively with communities and with the wider path networks. It will therefore be important to implement the Plan once it has been agreed to maintain public confidence in the process. Potential funding partners for capital projects will need to be approached to ensure that projects can become embedded in future operational plans and funding rounds.

Next Steps

39.   The next step will be to pass the Interim Draft Plan for printing, agree specific dates, times and venues for the next round of public consultation in the spring. The consultation, which will take place between April and June, will show the proposed core paths network on detailed maps and will provide a sound basis for all parties to provide feedback.

40.   Thereafter, Park Authority staff will attempt to resolve any outstanding issues with relevant parties and prepare a revised Draft Core Paths Plan for the Board to consider in December 2007. The Draft Plan must be submitted to the Scottish Executive by February 2008. There is a strong imperative to ensure that the network is sufficient and it should be borne in mind that there may be a Public Local Inquiry at a later stage. A final, formal consultation will be required which is programmed for spring 2008 and then, depending on the nature of the representations made, the Plan can be adopted.

Bob Grant
Sandra Middleton
February 2007

bobgrant@cairngorms.co.uk
sandramiddleton@cairngorms.co.uk

Annex 1: Extracts from the finalised National Park Plan

Priority for Action: Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access

Outcomes for 2012 – what does this seek to achieve in five years?
i. A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.
ii. Land managers and those enjoying the outdoors will have a better understanding of their respective rights and responsibilities which will positively influence behaviour and enable all to enjoy the special qualities of the National Park.
iii. 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.
iv. There will be greater involvement of communities, land managers and visitors in the management and maintenance of paths.
v. There will be more effective connections between public transport and places with outdoor access opportunities.
vi. There will be locally based healthy walking groups throughout the National Park and active promotion of outdoor activity by health professionals in order to contribute positively to the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors.

Annex 2: Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan
Summary report on Stage 1 Public Engagement

Introduction

1. The first stage of the Core Paths Plan process targeted four main interest groups: communities of place; land managers; people who recreate in the Park (both visitors and residents, including businesses, national organisations and clubs e.g. Ramblers Association, Scottish Canoe Association, Cairngorm Club, etc.); and visitors to the Park. This report provides a summary of how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) engaged these different groups of people and the feedback we received from them during the first round of consultation which ran throughout September, October and November 2006[1].

The Process

2. The CNPA ran two workshops aimed at land managers, two workshops aimed at people who recreate in the Park, 19 community drop-in events. Staff also attended two of the larger Highland Games in the National Park in order to capture information from visitors. Work was also carried out in conjunction with members of the Local Outdoor Access Forum, a number of schools, and Tourist Information Centres. The leaflet explaining the Core Paths Plan process and specially designed questionnaires were distributed to everyone attending events and were also available for download from the CNPA website.

3. The aim of this first round of engagement was to raise awareness about core paths and to seek views about the paths that are important to people. Care was taken to manage peoples' expectations in relation to what could be achieved through the process. It is important to note that people were <u>not</u> asked to identify those paths which they think should be designated as core paths. People were also asked to identify their aspirations for new paths that should be built or promoted. However, participants were advised that there is limited funding available and there could be no guarantee that any new paths would be built.

The Feedback

4. Most of the events were well attended and 568 questionnaire responses were received, both through the post and at events. The events involved a great deal of one-to-one discussion with people and so the information collected was often much richer than was written on the forms. This prompted some excellent debates and presented the opportunity for raising awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and other issues. Evaluation sheets were completed by attendees at all of the events and the feedback received has been extremely positive.

---

[1] Detailed reports for each community and interest group will be made available on our website in due course

5.   A number of common issues and comments arose at many of the events. With exceptions in a few communities, most people identified that they think the existing path network in their area is already good. Typically, the issues were raised about how the path network was promoted and managed. There was a view from most people that this could be improved so that the existing path networks were more valuable to more people. Most people identified low-level walking around communities as the most popular activity, and there was particular demand for circular routes, near to settlements. Dog-walking was also very popular, although people not cleaning up after their dogs was a common complaint. Demand for traffic-free and barrier-free cycling and horse-riding was identified in a number of communities, as was the need to remove barriers such as narrow gates or steps to provide better access for push-chairs. A number of canoeists and kayakers identified the River Spey as important with a lesser number also highlighting the River Dee.

6.   Participants were generally understanding of the fact that funding would be limited and that it therefore needed to be targeted at the paths which were of most social value. However, funding for maintenance of path networks was a key concern. Land managers in particular were concerned about increased use of core paths and any associated increase in liability, and sought assurances that the paths would be appropriately maintained. Many participants gave their opinions about potential funding mechanisms for maintaining core paths including use of Land Management Contracts, visitor pay-back schemes and path sponsorship.

7.   The requirement to promote and way-mark core paths caused some debate, particularly in relation to the suitability of promoting upland and mountain paths. The general feedback was that upland and mountain paths should not be promoted and should not be designated as core paths. However, it was clear that such paths still required maintenance. There was also some debate about whether or not core paths should be identified as such and the prevailing view was that they should be marked in a similar way to the existing network of promoted paths. In many of the communities, tourism businesses and staff from Tourist Information Centres noted that there needs to be much better information in the village centres (e.g. near to bus stops and shops) to enable visitors to find the starting point of paths.

Conclusions

8.   This first round of consultation and engagement has successfully engaged with a wide range of people, including both residents and visitors. There is widespread enthusiasm for active management of paths to allow people to get out and enjoy the Park. It is apparent that most of the potential core paths network is already in place. The most important thing that implementation of the Core Paths Plan can deliver is improved information and promotion of paths, removal of barriers to enable a wider range of users and abilities to access them and overall management of the path network in a coordinated way. There is also a good fit between the approved National Park Plan and the aspirations of those people who fed in their views through the consultation.

Sandra Middleton

December 2006

Annex 3 - Methodology for selecting the core paths network

Stage 1 - Assessing individual paths

1. During the public engagement process the majority of people identified paths near to where they live as the ones that are the most important to them. Guidance on the Core Paths Plan expects that many core paths will be located close to where people live.

2. All core paths will be signposted at key access points in order to encourage the use of the paths and create confidence in their use. Policy 10 of the draft Outdoor Access Strategy[2] supports a, "presumption against way-marking in wild, remote or other sensitive areas, especially in mountainous terrain, where people are expected to be self-reliant."   Assessing paths for their proximity to settlements will have a second benefit of identifying those paths which may not be suitable for promotion and sign-posting for reasons such as safety.

3. In line with the aims of the National Park, it is essential that designation of a core path will not have a significant negative impact on sites designated for their sensitive natural and cultural heritage. Core paths will have an important role in ensuring that people can easily experience the special qualities of the Park.

4. **Method** - All paths (both existing and aspirational) identified through engagement with the public will be screened to identify those paths that lie outwith 4 kilometres of a settlement. These paths will then be identified for consideration in Stage 2. These paths will then be screened for those that lie within areas designated for their sensitive natural and cultural heritage, these paths will then be highlighted to help inform the second stage.

Stage 2 – Selecting the Core Paths Network

5. The legal requirement is that the core paths network should be the basic framework of routes which are, "sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area."[3], the area being the National Park. The National Park is a large area to work with, with diverse communities with varying needs and aspirations and as such there is a requirement for a more local approach in different areas of the National Park. Core paths networks will be identified for each Outdoor Access Strategy Action Area to enable a more local approach.

6. **Method** – The paths identified as being close to settlements in Stage 1 will be considered at Stage 2 for inclusion in the area networks. In some cases the public engagement process did not identify all of the paths which may be considered as essential for achieving a core paths network and as such, additional paths may also be considered where appropriate. The selection of candidate core paths networks within each Action Area will use a criteria based approach, the basis of the

---

[2] Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy, CNPA, 2007.
[3] Part 1 Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 Section 17(1)

application of said criteria will be a value judgement given by the Outdoor Access Team informed by the key issues and priorities as identified in the Outdoor Access Strategy and the information obtained during the public engagement process.

7.   The criteria have been developed to reflect the aim of the Core Paths Plan. The core paths network within each Action Area should reasonably satisfy each of the five following criteria and collectively be sufficient to give reasonable access throughout the area:
   a) **Contribute to the positive management and stewardship of the sensitive natural and cultural heritage of the National Park and promote its understanding and enjoyment;**
   b) **Provide, or provide access to, a range of activities which will support stakeholder needs;**
   c) **Provide, or provide access to, paths for a range of abilities;**
   d) **Provide, or provide access to, links between communities;**
   e) **Provide links within communities and to key public transport connections and places of local importance.**

Stage 3 – Including existing promoted paths

8.   The selection of paths at Stage 2 will identify a basic framework of routes and these may include many of the existing promoted paths[4] in the National Park. Whilst the public engagement process was as thorough and inclusive as it could be, it is recognised that it only provides a snap-shot of opinion over a short period of time from a relatively small audience. Consequently, some existing promoted network may not have been included. Paths that are already promoted have, by their very nature, been valued as important. Inclusion of the existing promoted paths in the core paths network provides a much clearer link with the relevant access related outcomes identified in the National Park Plan and provides an opportunity for the CNPA to realise the benefits of the Core Paths Planning process in it's wider objectives.

9.   **Method** - Stage 3 will involve adding all remaining existing promoted paths[8] which have not yet been identified through the selection process in Stage 2, into the candidate core paths network.

Stage 4 - Assessing the Park-wide network and its affordability

10.   Two further tests need to be applied. The first is to consider the extent of the proposed network for the Action Areas and to determine whether or not, collectively, they meet the test of sufficiency for the whole of the National Park. At this stage any overlap between the identified core paths and any designated Long Distance Routes (LDR) should be removed. The Speyside Way is the only such route in the National Park. It is already designated under separate legislation and has an adequate management scheme and funding package in place, supported by a number of public bodies working together. Overlapping designation would add

---

[4] As defined in the Outdoor Access Audit, CNPA, 2005.

little value. The LDR should of course be managed in close association with the core paths network.

11. The guidance[5] states that the core paths system needs to be achievable and sustainable, so the second test needs to take account of projected resources. The proposed network may require capital funding for the implementation, upgrade or repair of paths as well as funding for improved signage, way-marking and associated promotional information.   Where a new path is to be considered an assessment will have to be made as to whether or not the path could reasonably be made available for its intended use as a core path within 2 years of the Plan being adopted.   This assessment will include a judgement as to the potential costs involved.

12. Dependent on available resources new paths will be prioritised for implementation dependent on where they add greatest value to the network and provide the greatest public benefit. If it becomes apparent that there is a need for a new path but that it cannot be put in place within a 2 year time frame then it may be developed as part of the wider path network and could be considered in a subsequent review of the Core Paths Plan. This is in line with current guidance.

Sandra Middleton
February 2007

---

[5] Part 1 Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, Guidance for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities Section 17(1)

Annex 4 Summary of advantages and disadvantages of Options 1 and 2

Option 1

Key features:
• a basic core paths network;
• the minimum required to satisfy the legal requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;
• does not include all existing promoted paths; and
• comprises largely existing paths but with some new build and upgrading of paths around communities with very poor provision at present.

Advantages:	Disadvantages:
• Lesser extent makes this network relatively cheaper	• Will create a two-tier system of promoted paths, some of which are core paths and others not.
	• Community aspirations less likely to be met.
	• Less likely to meet the standards expected of National Park
	• Less likely to contribute to NP Plan outcomes.

Option 2

Key features:
• a more extensive core paths network;
• comprises the network defined in Option 1 plus all low ground routes that are currently promoted through leaflets and signposting as defined in the Outdoor Access Audit;
• largely existing paths but with some new build and upgrading of paths around communities with very poor provision at present.

Advantages:	Disadvantages:
• Builds on the history of paths that have been promoted in the past	• Relatively more expensive
• Creates a unified system of paths that are promoted throughout the Park bringing benefits for overall management	
• More likely to meet NP standards	
• Community aspirations for paths more likely to be met	
• More likely to contribute to NP Plan outcomes	