



For decision

Title: Active Cairngorms Action Plan

Prepared by: Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning and Rural Development

Colin Simpson, Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel

Adam Streeter Smith, Recreation and Access Manager

Purpose

This paper introduces the Active Cairngorms Action Plan which is presented for approval along with a summary of related work that has been completed to date. The Action Plan will help to deliver many of the objectives of the National Park Partnership Plan relating to outdoor activity, health, wellbeing and general enjoyment of the Park in a sustainable way.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Approve the Action Plan (Appendix 1)
- b) Note the summary of engagement that has gone on in preparation of the Plan (Appendix 2)
- c) Note that a paper will be brought back to the Board annually to report on the progress with delivery.
- d) Note the work that has been undertaken by Cairngorms National Park Authority and partner organisations on the management for visitors in 2023 (Appendix 3)
- e) Note the summary of the grants awarded by Cairngorms National Park Authority to partners as part of the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme (Appendix 4)

Background

1. The National Park Partnership Plan 2022 - 2027 highlights that a number of specific Action Plans are required, as shown at Figure 1. Several of these Plans are now in



place – notably the Local Development Plan, Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan and Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. Each Action Plan adds value to the Outcomes and Objectives set out in the National Park Partnership Plan and assists in the development and maintenance of the partnership structures and relationships that are critically important for delivery.

Figure 1: Summary of the National Park Partnership Plan and the related the Action Plans for the Park - Nature (Green), People (Blue) and Place (Brown)





2. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan aims to make it easier and safer for people to enjoy the National Park's special qualities responsibly, whatever their age, ability or background. It also supports residents and visitors to be more physically active and to learn about, care for and appreciate the National Park.
3. The Action Plan also reinforces the role that outdoor access has in underpinning the National Park as a sustainable tourism destination, supports healthy lifestyles and engagement with the Park's special qualities, and highlights the role of a dynamic family of Ranger Services. It also seeks to energise partners around the opportunities to address biodiversity-loss through volunteering, reducing recreational disturbance and tackling the challenges of visitor pressures at key hotspots.
4. The Action Plan is structured around the following priority areas of work:
 1. Managing for Visitors - Our approach to managing visitor pressures at key hotspots
 2. Minimising recreational impacts on sensitive species and habitats
 3. Ranger Services
 4. Public health in the outdoors
 5. Volunteer Cairngorms
 6. Youth and outdoor learning
 7. Paths and trails

Strategic Context

5. There are many Objectives in the National Park Partnership that relate to the scope of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan but the most directly relevant are in the People and Place sections:

Nature

- A7: Reduce wildfire risk by developing an integrated wildfire management plan for the National Park
- A13: Ensure species thrive in the National Park with key assemblages across the Cairngorms within the semi-natural landscape.

People

- B9: Mental and physical health
- B10: A Park for All
- B11: Volunteering and outdoor learning



Place

- C5: Visitors to the National Park
 - C7: Transport to and around the Park
 - C8: Accessible path and cycle network
 - C9: High-quality visitor experience
 - C10: Cultural heritage
6. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will also support the delivery of Cairngorms 2030 programme as well as securing elements of the legacy of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project.

Process to develop the Action Plan

7. The preparation of the Action Plan was overseen by a Project Board involving a Cairngorms National Park Authority Board member (Gaener Rodgers), the Chair of the Local Outdoor Access Forum (John Grierson) and Cairngorms National Park Authority Director of Planning and Place. Staff have engaged with the Local Outdoor Access Forum, Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, Equalities Advisory Panel, the Managing for Visitors Group; with representative recreational bodies through the Scottish Outdoor Recreation Network; and directly with land managers and key staff in stakeholder organisations. See summary of the engagement undertaken in Appendix 2.
8. Key strategic assessments were produced, including Habitats Regulation Assessment and Equality Impacts Assessment, and appropriate changes made to the Action Plan. Further details are available on request.

Key issues

9. Key issues arising from the engagement process for the Board to consider in approving the Plan include:
- a) Managing disturbance to species and habitats: This work delivers on an action in the National Park Partnership Plan and builds on recent work of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. There has been broad support from consultees to this approach to help conserve the special qualities of the Park on the basis that access rights are not being restricted. In line with Guidance from NatureScot that was published in February 2023, this approach (as set out in Annex 1 of the Action Plan) is based on the following General Principles:



- Least restrictive access
- Evidence-based actions
- Targeted measures
- Shared understanding and collaboration
- A flexible approach
- Clear and effective communication

Source: NatureScot Guidance <https://shorturl.at/ckzJU>

- b) **Managing for Visitors:** There is very strong broad-based support of this area of work that has developed especially well due to the partnership arrangements and new measures that were put in place to respond to the Covid pandemic. There is need to see this work delivered alongside the work set out in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan.
- c) **Ranger Services:** The unique approach in the Cairngorms National Park to promoting a family of Ranger Services continues to find very strong support. The combination of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service (operating across the whole National Park) and the grant-aid arrangements (for specific site-based services) provides a flexible and dynamic approach that makes very effective use of public funds. The ability to use the partnership arrangements to promote innovative programmes like the Junior Ranger project, and to support volunteering activity is proving to be extremely popular. The family of Ranger Services also work closely with disadvantaged groups to support local community projects. There is strong demand to foster the partnership approach, support further professional development and training; and champion opportunities for careers in rangers.

Strategic risk management

10. Risk management was considered by the Project Board in preparation of the Action Plan and the corporate strategic risk register will be updated accordingly.

Implications

11. The financial and staffing resource requirements required by the Park Authority to support the delivery of the Action Plan will be incorporated into forward budget forecasts as set out in the Operational Plan. Resource implications are affordable within current and expected funding levels.



Governance and Assurance

12. The governance of a programme of work that delivers this plan will be supported by the Local Outdoor Access Forum.

Management for Visitors in 2023

13. The arrangements for the Management of Visitors that had been put in place during the COVID period were continued and improved, comprising regular meetings of the Managing for Visitors Group, deployment of the family of Ranger Services and expenditure on capital improvements. A brief review of data collected is attached at Appendix 3. Overall, the arrangements worked well and CNPA continues to feed into national arrangements that are coordinated by VisitScotland. Looking ahead, the main areas to be developed are set out in the Action Plan.

Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme

14. Since 2021 Cairngorms National Park Authority has developed and delivered the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme which has supported a range of projects to address critical issues in the management for visitors by providing grant aid. In April 2023 Cairngorms National Park Authority invited the submission of Expressions of Interest from land managers through the Managing for Visitors Group and assessed project proposals against the following criteria. Projects selected for funding should:

- a) Provide a warm welcome for visitors and support exceptional experiences
- b) Mitigate any negative impacts from increased recreation in sensitive or popular sites
- c) Reduce potential conflict between residents and visitors and/or between users
- d) Promote collaboration across land management and organisational boundaries ensuring a positive visitor experience
- e) Contribute to delivery of the Managing for Visitors Plan

15. A summary of the grants awarded is attached at Appendix 4.

Next steps

16. The key next steps with the work outlined above are as follows:

- January 2024: Upload Action Plan to website and provide limited print copies



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- May 2024: Re-launch Local Outdoor Access Forum as Active Cairngorms Advisory Forum
 - Dec 2024: Annual report to Cairngorms National Park Authority Board