



Foreword - Park Authority Board member

Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park is the largest National Park in the UK 4,528 sq. km (6% of Scotland's land mass) and is home to one quarter of the UK's rare and endangered species. Around 19,000 people live in the National Park across the areas of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, Perth and Kinross, with nearly two million visitors enjoying this special place every year. People have visited this special place for generations, attracted by the landscape, nature and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Strategic context

This document is the Active Cairngorms Action Plan for 2024 – 2028, and it sits within the wider context of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027. Launched in August 2022, the Partnership Plan sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues.

In particular, the Partnership Plan:

- Sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park.
- Guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park.
- Provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan.
- Is the Strategic Regional Land Use Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park.
- Is the Economic and Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the National Park.

The Partnership Plan is arranged in three sections: Nature, People and Place, with each section setting out the outcome that we want to achieve by 2045 (the year Scottish Government has committed to achieving net zero). Each of these sections is supported by a set of objectives, actions for the next five years and a comprehensive set of policies. The actions within the Active Cairngorms Action Plan add value to the National Park Partnership Plan.

The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will support the delivery of Cairngorms 2030 an ambitious programme to deliver by 2030 a National Park where people and nature thrive together.

Alongside this Active Cairngorms Action Plan sit a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan, which sets out a strategic approach to investment in, and maintenance of, tourism and visitor infrastructure in the Cairngorms National Park. The Local Development Plan 2021 will guide the form of any built development and ensure it is in the right place. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan (still in development) will promote an economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms. Also in development is the Strategic Active Travel Plan, which will include a range of actions to influence how people travel to and around the National Park.

About this action plan

The Active Cairngorms Action Plan aims to make it easier and safer for people to enjoy the National Park's special qualities, whatever their age, ability or background. It also encourages people to be more physically active and to learn about, care for and appreciate the National Park.

Nearly two million people visit the National Park every year and around 19,000 people live here. The provision of high-quality outdoor facilities and activities is vital to our visitors and is a major contributor to the National Park's economic success, and to the health and wellbeing of its residents and visitors. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will help our visitors enjoy the National Park's special qualities in a sustainable way, safeguarding and protecting our most sensitive species and habitats – for example, by identifying actions to reduce the impact of disturbance on sensitive species and habitats.

Suitable promotion of the wide range of recreational opportunities available in the National Park is key to influencing visitor behaviour and supporting people's wellbeing. Our aim is that people living in or visiting the National Park know the health benefits of physical recreation and are enabled, supported and inspired to be more active.

Through volunteering we want people to engage with, and feel part of the solution to safeguarding the National Park's special qualities against climate change and biodiversity loss.

Learning about the Cairngorms and the way it is managed will increase understanding and appreciation of the National Park. This will nurture an ethos of respect and a commitment to caring for the countryside that we live in, visit and work in.

Active Cairngorms Action Plan

Plan Structure

The plan will help us deliver the strategic objectives in the Partnership Plan as follows:

Nature: Outcome – A carbon negative and biodiversity-rich National Park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems.

A7: Fire Management

A13: Species Recovery

People: Outcome – A wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.

B9: Mental and physical health

B10: A Park for All

B11: Volunteering and outdoor learning

Place: Outcome – A place that people want to live in, and visit that works for all

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

Seven priority areas for action have been identified for the Active Cairngorms Action Plan:

1. Managing for visitors
2. Minimising 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, trails and outdoor access duties

The key actions for each of these priorities are identified below, all of which will help to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan.

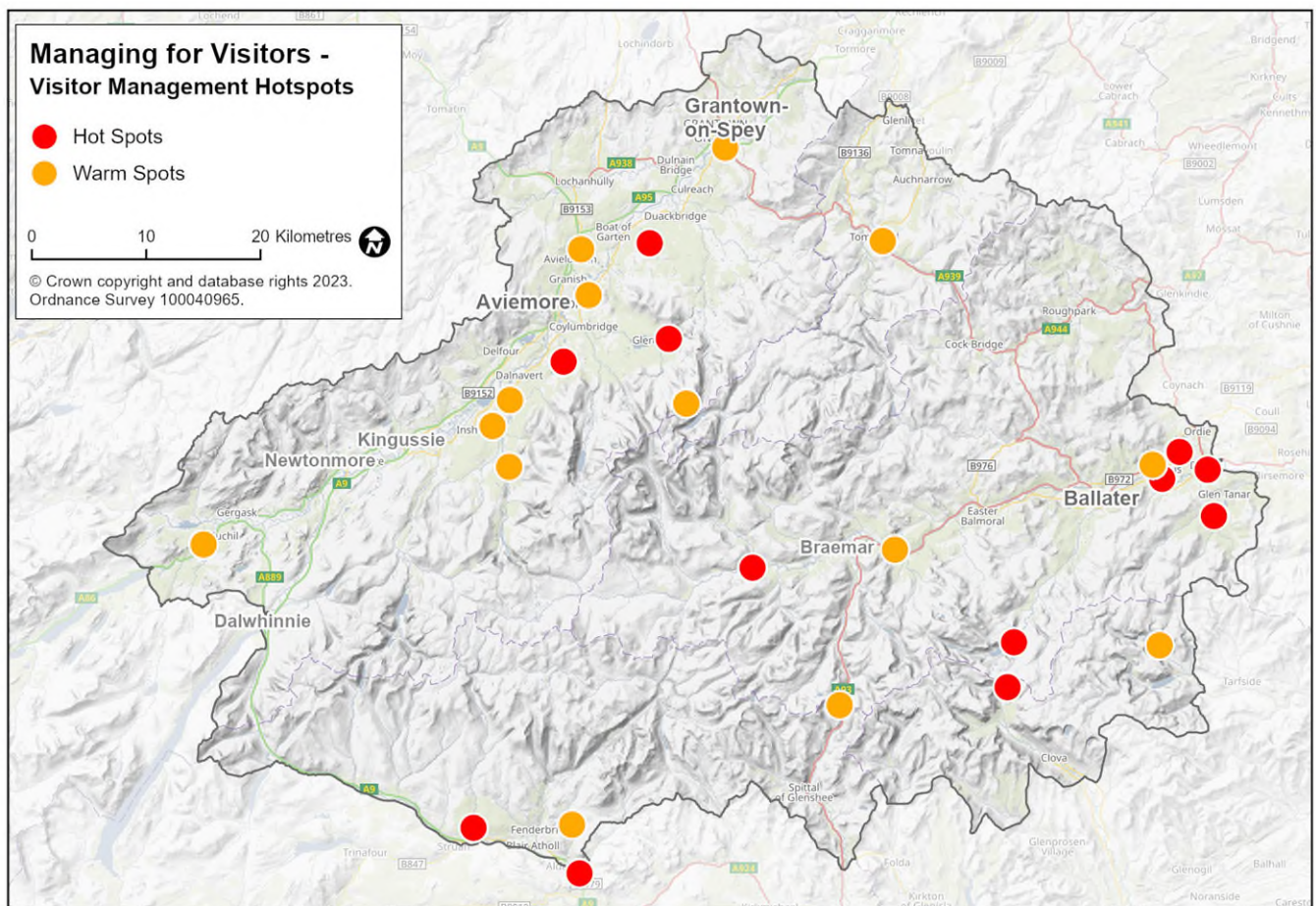
Priority actions

Managing for visitors

During and after the Covid-19 pandemic we saw significant changes in visitor distribution and behaviour in the National Park, and across Scotland, due to the easing of lockdown policies and the desire of visitors to experience the outdoors and nature. Significant new pressures were put on certain locations in the National Park.

New arrangements for managing these pressures were put in place, at national level and within the National Park, during this time and we developed a level of partnership working that we had never seen before in this field. Areas of the National Park that were popular with visitors and which saw instances of antisocial behaviour were identified (see Map 1). Resources were invested to increase the presence of rangers on the ground, including the development of a new Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service. New awareness-raising campaigns were developed to reach new audiences and investment in visitor infrastructure planning was stepped up.

Map 1 – Visitor Management Hotspots



Map 1- Visitor management hotspots

Looking ahead we want to continue this exemplary approach to partnership work and the ambitions for this area of work are:

1. To work with visitors, communities and businesses to protect the Park and minimise any potential conflicts.
2. Promote collaboration across land management and organisational boundaries to ensure a positive visitor experience.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Develop the Managing for Visitors Group to bring together key public sector partners, land managers and businesses and participate in national arrangements.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, VisitScotland
Influence visitor behaviour through a series of initiatives that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting messaging that visitors should 'tread lightly' as the main means of promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in the National Park • Providing clear guidance on recreational activities such as wild camping and water sports • Developing standard signage for key messages that promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and supporting land managers to use signs to help them promote responsible access • Ensure a wide range of audiences are engaged with through the use of different platforms, accessible formats, and different languages • Working well with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to reduce rural crime and ensure appropriate enforcement measures are in place 	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, ranger services, land – managers
Develop dedicated campaigns for new audiences in partnership with partners to positively influence specific visitor behaviours such as fires, toileting and roadside or overnight parking.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, National visitor management groups
Consult on options around fire byelaws for the National Park [inclusion in plan subject to Board decision in November 23].	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Investigate the viability of a visitor welcome app for the Cairngorms National Park, providing guidance to visitors and giving real time data on visitor distribution.	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Develop our capability to collect and analyse information about visitor distribution and behaviour spatially using digital technology.	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Deliver a programme to support best practice within the land management sector on safeguarding access rights to reduce access obstructions.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scottish Land and Estates

Case study - Managing for Visitors Group

Lockdown easing during the Covid pandemic led to unprecedented visitor pressure at key hot spots throughout the Park. This required coordinated action across a number of organisational, estate and geographic boundaries to address visitor pressures and prevent anti-social behaviour. During the Covid pandemic the Park Authority and partners develop the Managing for Visitors Plan. The Managing for Visitors Group is the main operational group for the management for visitors within the Cairngorms National Park that oversees the delivery of the actions within the Managing for Visitors Plan. Meeting every fortnight between April and October, it is attended by land managers from the public, private and third sectors, including local authorities, NatureScot and emergency services.

The success of this Group is measured by the continuing partnership and collaboration on messaging, ranger deployment and innovative visitor management measures.

Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats

To ensure people and nature thrive together – and to maintain viable populations of sensitive species and safeguard fragile environments – significant planning and careful management activity is required. This area of work will focus on helping the public to engage positively with nature while, at the same time, minimising disturbance from recreation.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Reduce recreational disturbance and impacts on sensitive species and habitats
2. Gather information to inform future management measures.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Develop and utilise methods for measuring the impact of disturbance on sensitive habitats and species – to be used to build a strong evidence base to help inform future management measures.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NatureScot
Utilise a spatial plan to prioritise the management of reductions in recreational disturbance to species and habitats (See Annex 1 and Map 2).	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NatureScot
Reduce the impact of recreation on ground-nesting birds by implementing site-specific actions and initiatives with land managers.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NatureScot, Forest and Land Scotland, Cairngorms Business Partnership, Land Managers

Develop and deliver “Dog Friendly Cairngorms” package for the National Park including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting communities to create and develop dog walking spaces to meet the needs of dogs and reduce pressure on sensitive areas for wildlife. ▪ Build knowledge and support by developing an active community of dog owners with information and understanding. 	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Develop further with users best practice for bikes including supporting the delivery of the Mountain Biking Recreation Management Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NatureScot, Land Managers
Update guidance on outdoor events to promote best practice.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership
Work with wildlife and activity guides to develop specific local training and codes of conduct for sensitive sites and species e.g., twin flower, beavers, raptors and leks.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, Wildlife and activity guides

Case study – Mountain-biking: The Trail Feathers project

In 2020, the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project conducted a survey with 388 mountain bikers within the Cairngorms National Park. The survey found that almost all felt responsible for the environment they ride in and were willing to change behaviours to help protect it.

In response to these findings, a group of over 20 riders from the Badenoch and Strathspey area came together to help turn this consensus into action and create a plan to help the mountain biking community enhance and protect the environment it utilises. The group of riders, who represent a range of riding abilities and interests and include bike shop owners, mountain bike guides and members of the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association, took part in a series of action planning workshops in early 2021.

Through this process the group have become more informed about capercaillie, have been able to identify potential solutions, and have agreed a goal and set of actions to help deliver wins for capercaillie and the mountain biking community. Their goal is to unlock at least 100 hectares of capercaillie habitat with no net loss of trails.

This goal and the actions to achieve it are known as the Trail Feathers Project. The project has been funded and facilitated through the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project and Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, with support from the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association.

Ranger Services

Rangers working in the National Park play a crucial role in helping people to understand, engage with and safeguard the natural and cultural environment that people come to enjoy. We have a unique approach to the deployment of rangers within the National Park with 14 different employers in the family of Ranger Services, all coordinated by Cairngorms National Park Authority using a mix of directly employed staff and rangers supported through grant-aid. These include site-based Ranger Services, employed directly by landowners to deliver services on their property, complemented by the Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service which works dynamically and flexibly, delivering services across a wider area. Cairngorms National Park Authority coordinates the family of Ranger Services and all rangers wear National Park branded clothing and collaborate to a very high degree, with coordinated training and operational management procedures. Ranger Services are supplemented in the busy summer period with additional seasonal staff and all rangers work closely with local communities, land managers, disadvantaged groups and young people, helping to look after nature and the cultural heritage.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. To maintain a strong and high-profile network of rangers in the Cairngorms where number of rangers employed within the Park is stable or increasing.
2. To ensure Ranger Services are connecting people with an outstanding National Park and work collaboratively to provide an innovative, inspirational and professional service.
3. Promoting skills and providing a career pathway into Ranger Services for people from a wide range of different backgrounds

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Coordinate and develop the family of ranger services to ensure coverage and deployment across the whole National Park and alignment with national arrangements.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ranger Services, NatureScot
Develop the Ranger Managers Group that brings together public sector and site-specific ranger services to ensure a coordinated approach and to feed into the national arrangements for rangers.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ranger Services
Develop the programme of training to develop best practice and a committed and skilled workforce.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ranger Services, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
Develop skills and new career pathways to help people into employment with ranger services.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ranger Services, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association

Case study – Trainee Rangers

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has run a Trainee Ranger Programme for two years to promote opportunities in a career as a ranger. Working alongside our partner Ranger Services, trainees have opportunities to build a range of practical skills, learn about the varied role of rangers across Scotland, and to understand career pathways, expectations and skill requirement for future career aspirations. Nine people have completed the scheme to date, including four rangers who were supported by the Kickstart scheme in 2021. Two of the kickstart rangers became seasonal rangers in the team after 2021 and one further trainee ranger became a seasonal ranger from 2022; others have progressed in directly related work outside the National Park. Feedback about the experience has been extremely popular.

Public Health and the Outdoors

The natural environment of the National Park is a valuable resource when it comes to tackling some of our most pressing health issues. With an ageing population, more people with multiple health conditions, chronic illness and long-term mental health issues for living in the National Park, developing green health opportunities can help us respond to these pressures. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will demonstrate how nature-based solutions can make a meaningful and lasting difference to people's health and wellbeing. This work is a key strand of the Cairngorms 2030 Project.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Meet the Target in the National Park Partnership Plan to have green health referral programmes in place in all GP practices in the National Park
2. Improving access to health-enhancing opportunities in nature.
3. Reducing inequalities through additional support for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Embed pathways to green health and nature within GP Practices, social care and education.	NHS, Cairngorms National Park Authority, local authorities
Make Green Health opportunities more visible: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain up-to-date information for green health opportunities and promote widely within communities:• Develop “green health” information on the Cairngorms National Park Authority website:• Prozymote Green Health Week	Cairngorms National Park Authority, community green health networks
Nurture strong community networks that will provide, and support access to, recreational opportunities for wellbeing:	Cairngorms National Park Authority, local voluntary action hubs,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop Green Health opportunities with key players: • Work with Ranger Services to integrate Green Health into the wider learning and engagement work (e.g. school visits, Junior Rangers etc). 	community green health networks, Highlife Highland
Liaise with specific community support organisations to support particular groups, e.g., carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, seasonal workers, etc.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, community networks
Develop dementia-friendly walks in each community within the National Park.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Paths for All
Develop and promote a health walks programme in each community of the Park.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NHS, Paths for All
Develop targeted promotion activities for those living sedentary lifestyles (for example, Green Health Week, World Mental Health day, Nature Festival etc,) to deliver and promote Green Health opportunities.	Cairngorms National Park Authority, NHS

Case study – Alzheimer Scotland Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre

Alzheimer Scotland developed Scotland’s first Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre for people with dementia at Badaguish Outdoor Centre. The new centre opened its doors in July 2022, giving more people with dementia and their families and carers a refreshed sense of freedom to explore nature. Set amidst spectacular scenery of the Cairngorms, this unique centre offers a welcoming, homely space for visitors and offers a wide-range of nature-based activities including walks and trails, birdwatching, wildlife surveys, basket making, and wood carving.

Volunteer Cairngorms

Environmental volunteering delivers tangible benefits to the management of the National Park, as well as to the physical and mental wellbeing of those participating in volunteering. It also provides excellent training opportunities and develops experiences that can lead to future employment. We want to see an expansion of the opportunities available for volunteering in the National Park, ensuring they are open to people from all backgrounds. Active management is required to ensure volunteers are adding value and not replacing or competing with employment opportunities.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work is:

1. Meet the Targets in NP Partnership Plan to have at least 200 volunteer rangers by 2030 and increase the number of volunteer days every year.
2. Develop a world-class network of Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Rangers, taking an inclusive approach to volunteering recruitment.

3. Raise awareness of existing environmental volunteering opportunities across the Cairngorms National Park amongst a wide range of people.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Increase the number of volunteer rangers to meet the needs of partners and the Cairngorms National Park Authority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivery of recruitment programmes ▪ Monitor and evaluate the demand and need of partners who provide opportunities for Volunteer Rangers: ▪ Maintain high quality volunteer management and the Volunteer Cairngorms portal: ▪ Maintain and deliver high quality Volunteer Ranger Programme and monitor capacity of Cairngorms National Park Authority to deliver it. 	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Develop and manage the Volunteer Experience Programme to specifically encourage new and under-represented groups into volunteering (e.g. carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ people, disability audiences, seasonal workers, etc)	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Increase volunteering opportunities linked to green health activities, and support a vibrant community of volunteer Health Walk Leaders across the Park to deliver a Health Walks Programme with a health walk in every community	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Paths for All
Promote awareness of environmental volunteering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advertising opportunities through the Volunteer Cairngorms portal ▪ Developing / supporting a series of awareness/ recruitment events ▪ Promoting value of environmental volunteering through media outlets. 	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Create a Cairngorms Litter Network to coordinate and encourage community-based litter picking and support relevant littering awareness campaigns	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Community groups

Case study – Volunteer Experience Programme

This specific initiative has been developed to promote an inclusive approach to volunteering, providing support to groups and individual who would not normally become involved. For example, in 2022 60-70 people from the charity Home Start East Highland, including mostly single mothers come out to participate in environmental volunteering. The group spent time in the wildlife garden learning how to pond dip, build bug hotels and get to know the animals in the Highland Wildlife Park. Home Start East Highland work closely with families that have been referred through social work and are based in regions all over Scotland. There are plans to extend the programme with refuge groups and other charities working with socially disadvantaged people from within and around the Park.

Young People and Outdoor Learning

Young people are the future of the Cairngorms and will have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the demands and challenges of an increasingly uncertain future. The outdoor learning and youth action work of Cairngorms National Park Authority is focused on engaging and empowering young people through a range of programmes so they feel equipped, informed and motivated for the future.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Provide opportunities for inspiration, learning and understanding outdoors through engaging with people.
2. Promote opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence and have their voices heard on the future management of the National Park

Actions	Lead partners
Promote and manage the use of the John Muir Award in the National Park to promote and inspire young people	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Deliver Junior Ranger programmes to five local secondary schools with monthly Junior Ranger activities in Badenoch and Strathspey and on Deeside	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Local Authorities, Ranger Services
Deliver education sessions for all schools in the National Park to promote Scottish Outdoor Access Code and outdoor learning	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ranger Services
Collaborate with other public sector partners to deliver and develop national education and skills-development programmes	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot, Countryside Learning Scotland
Promote and manage the Cairngorms National Park education travel grant which supports school and other education groups to access the Park	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Develop and facilitate the Cairngorms Youth Action Team events programme	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Support continuing youth collaboration with other national parks, youth initiatives and events to share and celebrate best practice, e.g. through EUROPARC or Youth Parliament events	Cairngorms National Park Authority

Case study: Junior Ranger Project

Delivered by ranger services and other key partners, the Cairngorms Junior Ranger Programme has developed opportunities for 11–18-year-olds to take part in fun, practical

outdoor activities to equip them with new skills, confidence and opportunities to act as ambassadors for the National Park. There is no charge for young people taking part in the programme. Six high schools participate in annual 5-day Junior Ranger Discovery Weeks, with up to 15 junior rangers per school per week. Monthly sessions are offered to a growing community of around one hundred regularly attending junior rangers living in or close to the National Park, open to any young person with an interest in the outdoors. Since 2021 the project has engaged with over 250 junior rangers and now has a partnership of over 40 motivated organisations, helping to deliver meaningful sessions with the collective goal of enhancing nature connection of young people growing up in our communities and skilling up the next generation of rural workers. The project won the national award in the Education Category in 2023 from the Scottish Land and Estates “Helping it Happen Awards”.

Paths, trails and outdoor access

The extensive network of paths and long-distance routes are fundamental to people’s enjoyment of our National Park and they help to underpin our reputation as a high-quality sustainable tourism destination. Since the National Park’s designation in 2003, we have built our outdoor access network in partnership with land managers and community groups who maintain and develop the paths network. Our unique approach helps ensure that the paths help to tackle health inequalities, support active lifestyles, active travel and to connect people with nature. Cairngorms National Park Authority has duties as an outdoor access authority to uphold access rights, develop a core path plan; and NatureScot has duties to keep Scotland Outdoor Access Code under review and to promote understanding of the Code. The whole approach is based on people exercising their rights responsibly, as set out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the vast majority of visitors and land managers take these responsibilities very seriously. Work to improve the facilities associated with the paths network is set out within the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Meet the Target in the NP Partnership Plan to increase the number of kilometres of safe and inclusive off-road, or segregated on-road, routes between communities by 2030
2. Ensure all Core Paths and the community paths networks are in good condition, well-promoted and accessible to the widest possible range of users
3. Ensure that the Scottish Outdoor Access Code is well promoted and well-understood.

Actions	Lead partners
Review and publish an updated Core Paths Plan by end of 2026	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Refresh the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum to ensure it plays an active role in advising on all aspects of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Develop more robust range of data-gathering tools as a basis for supporting visitor management and path investment priorities including:	Cairngorms National Park Authority

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strategic review of monitoring at indicator sites (lowland paths, upland paths, trail-heads, core paths and Long Distances Routes) • Use of people counters and other data gathering technologies to measure usage on key paths and car parks 	
<p>Promote path networks across the Park by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining a suite of community path leaflets in paper and accessible digital formats • Supporting partners to deliver appropriate publications (eg Hill Tracks Leaflet) 	Cairngorms National Park Authority, CBP, Community Groups, Scotways
<p>Ensure paths around communities are well-signposted and waymarked with good community map boards in every community across the National Park</p>	Cairngorms National Park Authority, Community Groups
<p>Support and expand the number of community path groups to deliver path projects through funding, training and sharing best practice</p>	Paths For All, Cairngorms National Park Authority
<p>Review the Upland Path Audit to identify investment priorities for the upland path network and develop innovative techniques to reduce upland path erosion</p>	Outdoor Access Trust Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Upland Path Advisory Group
<p>Expand the existing 'Adopt a path' scheme to promote volunteer-led approach to cover all upland paths in the Park</p>	Outdoor Access Trust Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority

Case study – Path Network Assessment

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has developed a programme to map paths and infrastructure, with the goal of producing an assessment framework for all paths within the core path network. The methodology has been developed to map the assets that are in and around lowland community core paths, creating a baseline in digital form for use with Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This has included training of rangers to conduct community core paths surveys. Going forwards, this work will help plan and manage projects including the replacement of directional path signage and removal or replacement of barriers such as narrow gates or stiles. Volunteers will also be encouraged to become involved, notably through the Adopt a Path Scheme, managed by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland and targeted at upland paths. The data will be combined with other digital data sets to improve our collective ability to plan and manage the paths resource in the Park.

Monitoring and review

A comprehensive programme of work is being set out to monitor delivery of the actions set out in the National Park Partnership Plan. The monitoring and review of this Action Plan will be closely tied to this work and led by Park Authority officers, with contributions from all relevant stakeholders. The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum will advise on delivery of the

Action Plan and the Managing for Visitors Group will discuss aspects of operational delivery. A formal report will be taken, at least annually, to the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board.

Annex 1: Developing a spatial approach to manage the impacts of recreational disturbance

Introduction

1. The National Park Partnership Plan sets out the Vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park. Amongst a broad programme of work to ensure that nature and people thrive together, the Plan identifies that the way people enjoy the outdoors should not negatively impact on species and habitats within the National Park. Specifically, there is an action to

“Consider all potential mechanisms to reduce disturbance on key species and recreational impacts on high ground.” Source: C3.

Background

2. Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone access rights to most land and inland water. However, people only have these rights if they exercise them responsibly and Section 2 of the Act defines “responsibly” as being:

“...in a way which is lawful and reasonable and takes proper account of the interests of others and of the features of the land in respect of which the rights are exercised.”

3. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code goes on to give further guidance – Part 3, on exercising access rights responsibly, includes a section on how to care for the environment indicating access users should do this by:
 - not intentionally or recklessly disturbing or destroying plants, birds and other animals, or geological features;
 - following any voluntary agreements between land managers and recreation bodies.
4. Part 3.45 of the Code then provides more detailed advice on how to act responsibly which includes: -
 - not lingering if it is clear that your presence is causing significant disturbance to a bird or other wild animal;
 - following any agreed information aimed at preventing significant disturbance to protected plants, birds or other animals, or at preventing the spread of erosion in more sensitive areas;
 - taking extra care to avoid disturbing more sensitive birds and animals, particularly during their breeding season.
5. Section 14 (1) (a) of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 states that *“The owner of land in respect of which access rights are exercisable shall not, for the purpose or for the main purpose of preventing or deterring any person entitled to exercise these rights from doing so put up any sign or notice.”* However, Section 29 does give Scottish

Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) the power to put up signs to protect natural heritage, although this power has very rarely been used.

6. The Act and the Code clearly indicate that land managers cannot exclude access users from land solely for the purpose of protecting wildlife. However, as described above, there is specific legislation to protect wildlife; and voluntary agreements between land managers and recreation bodies are legitimate although access should not be unreasonably prevented. Signage would have to be clear not to prevent access but to explain the basis for any request to voluntarily avoid an area.
7. The National Access Forum issued Guidance on Managing Public Access in Areas of Wildlife Sensitivity in February 2023. They noted that a number of key principles underpin all visitor management (see below) and prompted access authorities to develop area-based spatial planning to address and balance the issues
 - Least restrictive access
 - Evidence-based actions
 - Targeted measures
 - Shared understanding and collaboration
 - Flexible approach
 - Clear and effective communication:

Source: National Access Forum Guidance <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/doc/guidance-managing-public-access-areas-wildlife-sensitivity-scotland>

Looking forwards to a spatial approach

8. In the Cairngorms National Park an approach based on the principles above has developed ever since the Park was first established in 2003. For example, we have already developed an extensive core paths network and a wider range of promoted community paths – care was taken in planning this network to ensure these promoted paths not going to adversely affect wildlife through disturbance. All planning applications for new developments are screened against policies which take into account potential disturbance to species and habitats. There are very few restrictions on outdoor access and measures have generally been targeted to suit individual circumstances. When such measures are proposed, advice has always been sought from the Local Outdoor Access Forum and there has generally been very strong support for measures to promote the conservation of nature.
9. It is notable that the population of the National Park has grown since it was designated in 2003 (by around 13%) and visitor numbers have increased from 1.4M to nearly 2M per annum. The pressures on the wildlife and habitats of the Park are significant. In recent years, much innovative work has been done through the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project to take a community-led approach to managing recreational disturbance (e.g. the Trail Feathers project ([Mountain bikers - Cairngorms Capercaillie Project](#)) and the “Lek it be” campaign to target specific user groups <https://cairngormscapercaillie.scot/lek-it-be/> . As the Capercaillie Project comes to an end in early 2024 there is a need to carry forwards this work and plan for the future.

10. There are number of sensitive sites which have been identified where visitor management efforts are already being focussed. These include sites within formal designations such as Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI) or National Nature Reserves (NNR), at the visitor hotspots as identified in **Map 1**. Across these sites various measures are being deployed to encourage high standards of behaviour and reduce recreational disturbance including:
- Increased ranger patrols at sensitive times
 - Seasonal advisory signage
 - Path development projects to encourage people towards environmentally sustainable locations
 - Local management guidelines e.g. to reduce use of the water at Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve during the bird breeding season
 - Habitat management to provide additional vegetation cover for sensitive species
 - Targeted awareness-raising campaigns e.g. “Lek it Be” Campaign
11. We now want to develop a more strategic approach by identifying the areas where such measures are needed and to make sure they are working well for the future (**see Map 2**). The purpose of identifying these areas is to plan strategically for reductions in the impacts and disturbance to species and habitats. We are establishing a spatial approach to ensure prioritisation of effort at a Park wide scale to recreational disturbance in particularly sensitive areas.
12. To identify spatially where these areas are located, a combination of factors have been used:
- Presence of key species that are vulnerable to recreational disturbance
 - Presence of existing work to reduce recreational disturbance
 - Advice from NatureScot and from resource managers about existing and predicted levels of disturbance.
13. In working out what management measures are appropriate for each site:
- We will work with land-managers, communities and other stakeholders to co-create how the management measures in each area will be implemented
 - We will be open and transparent about the management measures to be used on each site
 - We will continue to take advice from the Local Outdoor Access Forum, and partners in the Manging for Visitors Group.
14. The menu of management measures is set out below to show the range of measures that may be deployed on each site – the specific combination of measures to be used will be determined on a site-specific basis.

Site Management Measures	Examples of Activity
Deployment of rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dawn and dusk ranger patrols at breeding sites • Supporting “Lek-it-be” campaign activity • General ranger patrols to ensure management guidance is followed
Seasonal signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Dogs on leads” during bird breeding season • To ensure management guidance is followed e.g. as at Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve re. watercraft
Voluntary agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local voluntary agreements with communities of interest (e.g. climbing crags re raptors, dog walkers) to avoid certain areas or follow certain guidelines • Development and implementation of community-led action plans for specific recreational groups i.e. mountain bikers, orienteers, paddle boarders
Path improvements to encourage people towards environmentally robust sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active promotion of suitable alternative paths • Consolidation of path networks • Investment in nearby path network
Track reinstatement/ path consolidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstatement of vehicle tracks to paths • Consolidation of path networks
Outdoor Event management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance to discourage large scale outdoor events at sensitive times of the year or on sensitive habitats
Parking management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of informal parking locations and provision of alternatives
Online and other media messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media campaigns focusing on seasonal activity.

Monitoring success

15. It will be important that we monitor the success of this approach and propose to do so by:

- Reporting annually to Cairngorms National Park Board and Performance Committee on the management measures in place across the range of sites within the network
- Collating information available on changes to species and habitats (recognising that such work is methodologically challenging to prove cause and effect)

- Undertaking specific studies where applicable and as resources allow
- Reporting on the degree of compliance with any measures and any expressions of concern.

16. We will keep this approach to managing recreational disturbance under review. It may be desirable to identify other areas to priorities the management of recreational disturbance in due course. Ultimately, if this approach is not successful it may be necessary to implement different or stronger measures to ensure that wildlife and habitats in the Park are conserved and enhanced.

Map 2 – Priority Areas for the management of recreational disturbance to species and habitats.

