

Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2023-28

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[To follow]

Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park is the largest National Park in the UK. Alongside 18,000 human residents, a quarter of the UK's threatened species also call it home. People have visited this special place for generations, attracted by the landscape, wildlife and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. This in turn has supported a thriving visitor economy, the largest employment sector in the National Park.

Our ambition is for tourism to be a force for good, not only in economic terms, but by contributing to thriving communities and making the Cairngorms a great place to live and work. We want to inspire our visitors to have great experiences but also to take action to address the climate and biodiversity crises, harnessing their love for this place to affect positive change.

National Park Partnership Plan and Strategic Context

This document is the Action Plan for 2023 – 2028, and it sits within the wider context of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022 - 2027 which acts as the overarching Sustainable Tourism Strategy. 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 the period from 2022-27. The Plan sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park and guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park and contribute to national programmes of work set out by Scottish Ministers.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and the Cairngorms Business Partnership have both signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action on Tourism and the Partnership Plan is our climate action plan for the destination. Further information is at <https://www.unwto.org/the-glasgow-declaration-on-climate-action-in-tourism>

The document 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 Sustainable Tourism Action Plan add value to the National Park Partnership Plan, and set out the contribution of the wider tourism industry to delivery of particularly relevant Objectives. In developing the Plan, we have also considered how we can contribute to Scotland Outlook 2030, the national tourism strategy.

The delivery of this Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is co-ordinated by the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership which brings together key businesses, agencies involved in tourism, community representatives and the private sector destination organisations that cover the Park (including Cairngorms Business Partnership, Visit Aberdeenshire and Visit Moray-Speyside, etc). It is one of a range of advisory forums for the National Park.

Alongside this Sustainable Tourism Action Plan sits a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan that 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 the right place. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan (still in development) will promote an economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool that enables National Parks and other protected areas to develop and manage tourism sustainably. It is based on five Principles:

1. Giving priority to protection
2. Contributing to sustainable development
3. Engaging all stakeholders
4. Planning sustainable tourism effectively
5. Pursuing continuous improvement

The Charter is about bringing people together, providing them with a framework to work collaboratively towards becoming a sustainable destination, with external verification and recognition of our work in this area. There is more information about the Charter here <https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/>.

The Cairngorms National Park has been accredited with the Charter since 2005, shortly after designation as a National Park. Every five years we submit a new Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism, while also looking back on delivery over the previous 5-year period.

Tourism in the Cairngorms National Park

Visitor numbers have seen steady growth since National Park designation in 2003. In 2019, the Cairngorms received an estimated 2 million visitors for the first time. Alongside that, visitor satisfaction rates had also climbed with an average satisfaction score of over 9/10. Visitors were also more likely to be attracted by National Park status, with 55% saying that it was an important factor in their decision to visit. Although most visitors were repeat customers, there was an increase in both first-time and overseas visitors.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed everything. We worked, in common with destinations around the world, to address the twin challenges of the sudden collapse of the visitor economy, and then increased post-lockdown footfall at key countryside sites. In the Cairngorms this led to a range of issues including more traffic and parking congestion, toileting problems and high levels of informal camping. This prompted us to establish a

range of new measures such as the establishment of a Managing for Visitors Group and a directly managed CNPA Ranger Service.

As the recovery period progresses, business surveys show that a number of wider factors are still challenging the tourism industry. Staffing and recruitment issues continue to prove very challenging after the loss of hospitality staff during the Covid-19 crisis the limited availability of affordable housing. Concerns around Covid-19 have not completely disappeared but are now overshadowed by consumer concern about the cost-of-living and energy prices. Inflationary pressures are also causing direct issues for businesses, with a significant dip in medium-long term confidence – in mid-2022 around 8% of businesses say they are considering ceasing to trade. (Source: Cairngorms Business Barometer)

Alongside these issues there is the very significant backdrop of the climate and biodiversity crisis which are the main themes addressed in the Partnership Plan. As visitors return to the Park, we need to help them change their travel habits to reduce carbon emissions and inspire them to care for this special place.

Sustainable Tourism Action Plan

In delivering the actions below, all of which will help to deliver the NP Partnership Plan, there are two overarching priorities:

- 1) Businesses, visitors and wider stakeholders should be engaged in the journey to Net Zero and nature recovery
- 2) Communities and local residents should be involved in tourism decision-making where it affects them.

NATURE <i>Delivering against NPPP Objectives: A1 Net Zero; A13 Species Recovery</i> <i>Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030: Destination Net Zero</i>	
ACTIONS	Lead Partners
Encourage visitor investment in the National Park through visitor-giving, carbon offset schemes and other incentives, connecting visitors with the place through financial and emotional buy-in.	Cairngorms Trust, CNPA, CBP
Develop and implement a business-led Climate Action Plan that engages businesses in opportunities to lower their carbon footprint.	CBP
Investigate technological solutions to engage visitors and nudge them towards responsible choices in a way that enhances their experience of the destination.	CNPA, VisitScotland
Develop a programme that supports business engagement with customers in advance of their visit, including information about biodiversity and responsible enjoyment.	CBP, CNPA

PEOPLE Delivering against NPPP Objectives: B2 Wellbeing Economy; B4 Skills & Training; B5 Community Assets & Land; B8 Gaelic Language & Culture; B10 A Park for All Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030: Our Passionate People; Our Diverse Businesses	
ACTIONS	Lead Partners
Support, encourage and promote community-led tourism enterprises and develop a community tourism network for the Park.	VABS, SCOTO, CBP
Monitor residents' attitudes to tourism in their community through regular surveys and informal open meetings.	CNPA
Strengthen local cultural events through visitor engagement with Gaelic and other local languages, music, storytelling and built heritage.	CNPA, CBP
Identify measures and support needed to encourage Fair Work practices and a wellbeing economy in the tourism industry.	CNPA, CBP
Promote the Cairngorms as an exceptional destination to work in the hospitality industry and develop a training initiative to strengthen links between local schools / further & higher education organisations and the hospitality sector.	CBP, HIE/SE, SDS
Review and refresh the "Make it Yours" business engagement programme to ensure it meets the needs of our partners and informs and inspires frontline staff.	CNPA, CBP
Encourage a more diverse range of visitors to the Cairngorms by addressing barriers identified by under-represented groups and people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and supporting frontline tourism staff training.	CNPA
Engage with stakeholders to ensure that Scottish Government's proposals for a Local Visitor Levy, meet the needs of the Cairngorms National Park.	CNPA, local authorities

<p>PLACE <i>Delivering against NPPP Objectives: C1 Access to Housing; C5 Visitors to the National Park; C6 A Sustainable Destination; C8 Accessible Path and Cycle Network; C9 High-quality visitor experience</i> <i>Delivering against Scotland Outlook 2030: Our Thriving Places; Our Memorable Experiences</i></p>	
ACTIONS	Lead Partners
Produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan that defines the priorities for investment in tourism infrastructure for the next 5 years and seek additional funding for delivery.	CNPA, VisitScotland
Monitor the implementation of the new Short Term Let (STL) licencing arrangements and the development of measures such the STL Control Areas and ensure that we maintain an appropriate range of accommodation for visitors	Local Authorities, CNPA
Promote and invest in tourism assets produced by previous place-based initiatives - including Badenoch Storylands, SnowRoads Scenic Route, Tomintoul and Glenlivet Dark Sky Park, Cateran Eco-museum, the Speyside Way and Deeside Way.	CBP, CNPA & VisitScotland
Support development of new products and events to encourage visits at quieter times of year, particularly through the winter months. Commission destination marketing campaigns to foster growth at traditionally quieter times of year and to encourage longer stays, with increased value to the local economy.	CNPA, CBP
Develop and implement mechanisms to reduce disturbance on key species and recreational impacts on high ground	CNPA, NatureScot, Ranger Services
Develop opportunities for businesses to use their location in a National Park to build sustainable growth through branding, product development and targeted marketing.	CNPA, CBP
Build on the partnership structures and policies developed in response to the Covid-19 lockdowns as a model for resilience against future uncertainty.	CNPA

Monitoring and Review

A comprehensive programme of work is being set out to monitor the delivery of the Actions in the NP Partnership Plan. The monitoring and review of this Action Plan will be closely tied this work and led by CNPA officers with contributions from all relevant stakeholders. The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership will oversee delivery of the Action Plan and a formal report will be taken, at least annually, to the CNPA Board.

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[Add for publication: List of Acronyms]