

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title: CORE PATHS PLAN - ADOPTION**

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#### **Purpose**

This paper seeks the Board's formal adoption of the Core Paths Plan and highlights how it will help deliver Active Cairngorms.

#### **Recommendations**

**That the Board:**

- a) Adopt the Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park; and**
- b) Notes how the Plan will help deliver the forthcoming Active Cairngorms strategy.**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform has directed the Cairngorms National Park Authority to adopt the revised Core Paths Plan which was modified in light of the Reporter's recommendations and other advice received. Implementation of the Plan forms a key part of the priority programme of work for Active Cairngorms.

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## CORE PATHS PLANNING - FOR DECISION

### Core Paths Plan Approval

1. The formal, statutory process involved in revising the Core Paths Plan is over once the Board adopts the Plan. However, rather than the end of a process, it should be seen as the beginning as the Plan moves from development to continued implementation.
2. The process involved in reaching this stage has been both extensive and rewarding. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act placed a duty on the Cairngorms National Park Authority to develop a Core Paths Plan. The first Plan was adopted in 2010. Over the last two years the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum has supported staff in shaping the revised Core Paths Plan.
3. The formal consultation between May and July 2013 resulted in 19 objections of which 12 were resolved through negotiation. There were 7 outstanding objections relating to paths that were not possible to resolve through negotiation and resulted in a Local Inquiry being held. The Reporter agreed with CNPA on all but one of the objections and his recommendation was supported by the Minister in approving the Plan. Thus the only proposed core path that is to be removed from the plan is LBS124, the High Burnside link in Aviemore.
4. LBS124 in Aviemore was an aspirational path linking the High Burnside development with Craigellachie National Nature Reserve (NNR). This route was adopted in the first Core Paths Plan and proposed in the revised Core Paths Plan. In the intervening period CNPA sought to secure an agreement with the land owner but this proved unsuccessful. The land owner and the Community Council objected to this path's continued inclusion. CNPA made the case that the route would provide better links to the NNR and complement the community path network but the Reporter stated that evidence of support was out of date, that both the Estate and Community Council didn't support the route, so advised the Minister that the route should be removed and that this would not affect the sufficiency of the Plan.
5. The resulting network now totals 1073 kilometres (km) of core path, including 88km on water (River Spey) and 136km of core paths for Atholl and Glenshee which was not included in the previous plan. Annex I shows the revised Plan.
6. The Plan has been subject to full assessment under the Habitats Regulations and Strategic Environmental Assessment. The removal of LBS124 does not affect the conclusions of these assessments.

7. The Minister has now directed CNPA to adopt the Plan. The plan will be available in CNPA offices and through the website. In addition, all who corresponded during the consultations will be notified of its adoption and where copies can be viewed.
8. The adoption of the Core Paths Plan will directly help deliver our visitor experience priorities in our draft Corporate Plan, as well as supporting delivery of conservation and rural development priorities. It is a material consideration in the planning process and short Supplementary Guidance document that explains how the Core Paths Plan will be considered in the determination of planning applications is being prepared for Planning Committee approval on 17 April.

### **Recommendation**

9. **It is recommended that:**
  - a) **The Board adopt the revised Core Paths Plan for the Cairngorms National Park**

### **Implementation of the Plan**

10. The real gain from the Core Paths Planning process this time and the last has been developing an understanding of the wishes and aspirations of communities, and communities of interest, about the importance of particular paths in the National Park. The open process and the public consultation, combined with Ministerial approval provide a very sound basis on which to move forwards. Now the challenge is to undertake a programme of works which meets the aspirations expressed for the paths. Much of the previous work approved by the Board, for example on directional path sign design, will assist with this process.
11. The delivery of the Core Paths Plan is one of the key outcomes for Active Cairngorms both in terms of path development and path promotion but also in supporting active management. For example the network of core paths will provide a useful tool to land managers seeking to develop visitor management plans to protect sensitive species such as Capercaillie.
12. CNPA will prioritise its resources for path infrastructure to the core paths network. There are a number of means by which improvements to the core paths network will come about.
  - a) Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust - Staff have been working closely with colleagues in the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust in shaping a programme of works over this and the next financial year.

- b) Scottish Rural Development Programme – The previous scheme was not as effective as hoped in delivering path improvements. The proposed new scheme does look more attractive and staff will continue to encourage land owners, farmers and communities to take up the scheme.
- c) Community led initiatives – Staff will continue to support communities to develop proposals and seek funding.
- d) Guiding national programmes of expenditure – improvements to trunk and other roads provide opportunities to secure better routes for walkers and cyclists.

## Monitoring Progress

13. An essential component of delivering the Core Paths Plan is finding a suitable mechanism with which to measure progress. We have an established methodology developed (through consultation with the Local Outdoor Access Forum and other interested parties) to identify those paths that are “Fit for Purpose”. We propose to continue this method of monitoring. Periodic reports will be prepared at least biennially based on each path in the network passing three key tests:
- a) **Barriers and obstructions** – the path should be the least restrictive possible.
  - b) **Path surface condition** – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users.
  - c) **Directional path signs** – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.
14. Annex 2 provides further detail on what is likely to constitute a pass or failure in each of the three tests.

## Recommendation

15. **It is recommended that:**
- a) **The Board note how the Plan will be implemented and monitored.**

## Implications

### *Financial Implications*

16. The bulk of implementation will be financed and delivered through the agreed work programme with the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust.
17. The staff resources required to update the fit for purpose assessment is estimated to be around 4 days.

## Next Steps

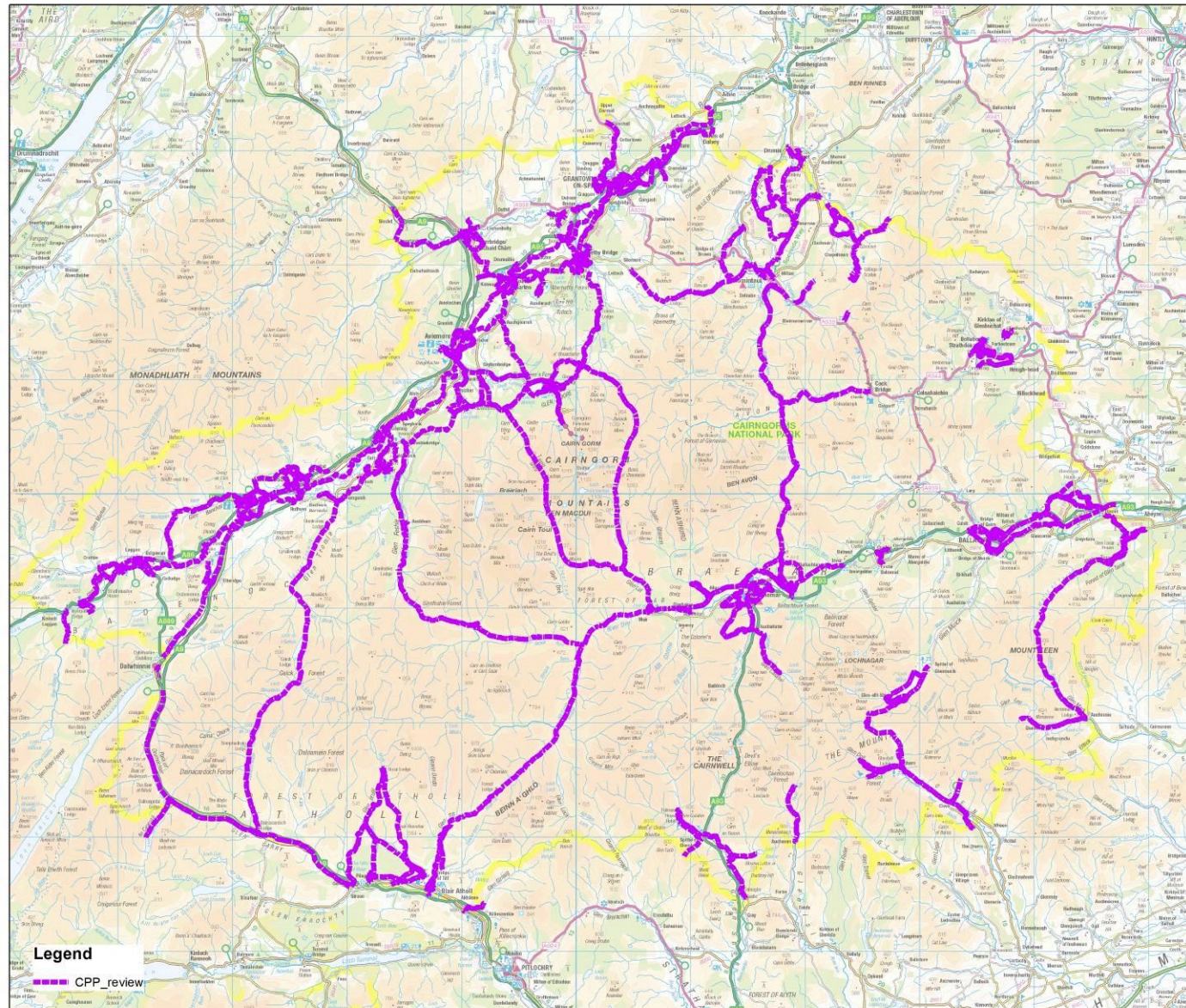
18. Progress towards the full implementation of the Core Paths Plan will feature in the Corporate Plan update to the Board and National Park Partnership Plan monitoring.

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**March 2015**

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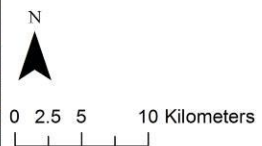
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Annex I- Map of Core Paths



CAIRNGORMS  
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
UGHDARRAS PAIRC NAISEANTA A'  
MHONAI DH RUAIDH

Core Paths Plan



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**Annex 2: Criteria for each of the three key tests which comprise the “Fit for Purpose” assessment (paths on land)**

<b>Key test</b>	<b>Likely reasons for passing</b>	<b>Likely reasons for failing</b>
a) <b>Barriers and obstructions</b> – the path should be the least restrictive possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No barriers</li> <li>• Location of any barriers does not preclude use of most of the path</li> <li>• Type of barrier is unlikely to preclude most likely use</li> <li>• Location of route means users’ expectations are to encounter some barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers are obstructing many users</li> <li>• Multiple barriers along the route</li> <li>• Proximity to settlements means greater expectation that route is barrier free (subject to the nature of the route)</li> <li>• Poor design of gates and stiles precludes expected use</li> </ul>
b) <b>Path surface condition</b> – the overall path surface condition should cater for likely and potential users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surface robust for expected use (e.g. free draining)</li> <li>• Comfortable for most users</li> <li>• Appropriate width for expected use and location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wet and muddy sections of route are likely to preclude expected users</li> <li>• Surface material is excluding some users (e.g. unconsolidated ballast on old railway line which makes walking difficult)</li> <li>• Too narrow for expected use (e.g. pushchairs and cyclists)</li> </ul>
c) <b>Directional paths signs</b> – the path should have appropriate fingerposts and intermediate waymarking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage is in line with the National Park Policy</li> <li>• Signage is appropriate to location and likely users</li> <li>• Signage is legible and in good condition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage is inadequate, in poor condition or absent</li> <li>• Significant junctions lack appropriate signage</li> <li>• Proliferation or location of signs causes confusion or spoils user experience</li> </ul>