
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Draft Core Paths Plan
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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform the LOAF of progress to date in developing the Draft Core Paths Plan and to seek advice as set out below. The advice will be summarised and presented to the CNPA Board to assist them in the decision making process in January.

Advice Sought

Advice is sought from the Forum on the following questions:

1. What does the Forum consider to be the value and main benefits of establishing a core paths network for the National Park?
2. Is the Forum content with the way in which the process of developing the core paths plan has been carried out to date in the Cairngorms?
3. Has the Forum had adequate involvement in the process?
4. Is the Forum content with the revised aim and objectives (see **Annex 1**)?
5. Is the Forum content that the Core Paths Plan should be revised in line with the advice received at the LOAF workshop in August (see **Annex 2**)?
6. If so, is the Forum content that the proposed core paths network will then be sufficient to give reasonable access throughout the area?
7. Has the Forum any other advice for the Board in relation to the Core Paths Plan?

Background

1. Providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access is a priority in the Cairngorms National Park over the next five years in the National Park Plan which recognises the need to have, "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."¹ The core paths planning process provides the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) with a good opportunity to lead on this priority. Developing a Core Paths Plan for the Park is also a statutory duty for the Park Authority arising from the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 ('The Act'). The Act states that the core paths network should be, "sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area."
2. The LOAF is a statutory consultee on the Draft Core Paths Plan and has provided advice to the CNPA throughout the process. Further LOAF member involvement in the process has taken place through membership of the Steering Group and the Project Board. The Steering Group was set up to provide specific advice on the process of developing a Core Paths Plan. Forum members Andrew Wells, Nonie Coulthard, Helen Geddes and Debbie Greene make up the Steering Group along with Ross Watson of the CNPA Board. Dick Balharry, Convener of

¹ Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007, Section 6 Priorities for Action 2007-2012, 6.4 Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access, Outcomes for 2012, iii, p103

the LOAF, is a member of the Core Paths Planning Project Board which takes decisions on the running of the project to develop the Core Paths Plan.

3. 'The Hub' is a group made up of representatives from the Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Paths for All Partnership. The purpose of the group is to keep an overview of the core paths planning process at national level and provide advice where appropriate. The group have provided some additional guidance in relation to the sufficiency of the core paths network:
 - the core paths network must be 'sufficient' in its own right;
 - a key consideration in establishing and justifying the sufficiency of the network will be the views expressed in the consultation responses;
 - professional judgement should be used to supplement geographical gaps in the consultation process and cater for latent demand;
 - sufficiency around settlements should be a priority;
 - all main user types (e.g. water-borne users, disabled, horse-riders) should have reasonable provision within the overall network at a level that can be justified as 'sufficient'.
4. The CNPA have now carried out two rounds of public engagement and consultation to help identify a core paths network for the Park. A report summarising the findings of the latest consultation on the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan was sent to Forum members and is available on the CNPA website. The findings in this report were the subject of a workshop for Forum members in August. The advice received from the Forum is detailed in a report of the workshop and summarised in the Paths for The Park newsletter. As a result of the advice already received from the LOAF and from The Hub (see *para. 3* above) the proposed core paths network is under revision and a paper will be presented to the CNPA Board in January 2008. With Board approval the Plan will be submitted to the Scottish Government in February 2008 as a Draft Core Paths Plan and will then be the subject of a formal public consultation, probably between April and July 2008.

Proposed revisions to the Core Paths Plan

8. The **main issues** identified during the consultation period relate to the aim and selection criteria of the Core Paths Plan, the inclusion of waterways in the network, paths through upland areas, quiet roads and pavements, the Speyside Way and inclusion of all routes that have already been promoted. The LOAF discussed these issues at the workshop in August on the basis of the information available at that time. A summary is at **Annex 2**.
9. It is proposed to revise the aim and selection criteria of the Core Paths Plan and to rename the selection criteria as 'Objectives'. These can be viewed in **Annex 1**. It is proposed that the network be revised to include some paths through upland areas, the Speyside Way and some quiet roads and pavements where appropriate. It is also proposed to include some, but not all, existing promoted routes.

Waterways

10. Inclusion of waterways in the network has been the single most contentious issue arising from the consultation. As such, the issue needs special consideration above and beyond the revisions described above.
11. The River Spey was proposed as a core path in the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan and its inclusion received both support and opposition. The LOAF provided advice on this issue at their workshop in August (**Annex 2**). Discussions took place between SNH and the CNPA to try and ascertain what impact core path designation may have. It was concluded that core path designation on its own would be likely to result in no, or only a modest, increase in the number of paddlers on the River Spey. Thereafter SNH completed a Natura appraisal of the

site and concluded that the proposal to designate the River Spey as a core path would not adversely affect the integrity of the site. Designation of the river would provide the opportunity and stimulus for improved information about people's rights and responsibilities when using the river with a view to increasing responsible behaviour. There would also be a stimulus for better management arrangements at access and egress points where necessary.

12. The River Dee was not proposed as a core path in the Interim Draft Core Paths Plan. However, a number of people responded to support its inclusion within the network. The LOAF provided preliminary advice on potential inclusion of the Dee at their workshop (**Annex 2**). The CNPA have subsequently contacted riparian owners on the River Dee to ask for their views and a number have responded, objecting to the proposal.
13. A summary of the case for and against inclusion of the Spey and Dee, in terms of the revised aims and objectives, will be presented at the LOAF meeting. The CNPA are currently awaiting a Natura appraisal of the site from SNH but this is unlikely to be available until after the LOAF meeting.
14. The CNPA Board will be asked to make a decision as to whether or not to include one, both or neither of the rivers as a part of the core paths network at their meeting in January.

Other matters

15. This a key stage for the Forum to bring to the attention of the Board any further thoughts or advice they have about Core Paths Plan. For example, there has been some discussion and concern from some quarters about the presentation of the core paths on OS maps. Will visitors understand what is meant by "core paths" without a lot of explanation? Is it appropriate to mark all such paths on the maps, both for land and water, with a purple line? Any thoughts or advice on these or other matters would be welcome now.

Next Steps

16. The advice provided by the Forum will be provided to the Board to assist in their decision making process. The revisions to the network will be identified in a Draft Core Paths Plan. This Plan will be submitted to Ministers in February. Thereafter the Draft Core Paths Plan will be the subject of a formal public consultation probably between April and July 2008.

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ANNEX 1

Draft Core Paths Plan – Revised Aim and Objectives

Aim

The Core Paths Plan will help people to enjoy and understand the special qualities of the National Park by identifying a network of paths which offer a wide range of high quality outdoor access opportunities.

Objectives (formerly Selection Criteria)

The core paths network will:

- a) Help to conserve this Park's natural and cultural heritage and encourage people to enjoy it in a responsible way.
- b) Help those living and working on the land;
- c) Help to deliver the priorities for each area identified in the Outdoor Access Strategy;
- d) Provide for a range of activities;
- e) Provide for a range of abilities;
- f) Include a range of popular paths;
- g) Include paths within and between communities and to public transport connections and places of local importance.

ANNEX 2

Summary of LOAF Advice on the key issues arising from the consultation (discussed at the Workshop in August)

Summary of LOAF Advice: **Aim and Selection Criteria**

The Aim should be made more concise. It was suggested that the 'Selection Criteria' become the 'Objectives' for the network and should be clearer and better reflect the needs of land managers. This advice has been reflected in the Revised aim and Objectives (see **Annex 1**).

Summary of LOAF Advice: **Paths through Upland Areas**

A distinction should be made between routes through mountain areas and those that lead to mountain summits. Mountain paths should be included only where they are relatively close to settlements and where there is relatively safe access through leaflets and trail-head information. Examples given were Meall a' Bhuachaille and Morrone. A small number of routes through the mountains should be included where it is known that they are well used and are viewed as the principle connections to, from and through the Park. No new route should be included in this category. Paths through remote and upland areas should have less promotion than other routes in the network. Information should be made provided to ensure that the type of environment and knowledge required to navigate within it are understood.

Summary of LOAF Advice: **Speyside Way. Quiet Roads & Pavements**

There is a need to ensure the Core Paths Plan is 'sufficient in its own right' (i.e. a network of paths that would stand on its own in providing for everyone's needs) and as such the Speyside Way should be included in the network. The network should also incorporate some on-road links to ensure it joins up. If an off-road alternative exists this should be considered in the first instance. The emphasis should be on the road being quiet, but any road should be considered if it meets the criteria.

Summary of LOAF Advice: **Promoted Routes**

The core paths network should be more selective than simply including all routes that have been promoted in the past. The network should only include existing promoted routes where they meet the needs of the community and contribute to the sufficiency of the network. The emphasis should be on the most important routes.

Summary of LOAF Advice: **Waterways**

The Plan would not be sufficient without including some waterways. In particular the Spey was identified as being a route of such significance and national importance that a plan of core paths in the National Park would simply look 'odd' without it. There was some debate about whether or not it would be appropriate to include the Dee at this time. It was felt that it is not reasonable to preclude the major rivers on the basis of fluctuating water levels and that the Spey, and the Dee to a lesser extent, are major rivers with reliable water levels which allow year round paddling. It was proposed that as the Dee and the Spey are SAC's they merit the highest opportunity for management and protection, not to designate the Dee would be demeaning its value.