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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## BRIEFING PAPER

**Title:** Briefing on National Park Plan Priorities for Action:

1. Conserving and enhancing biodiversity and landscapes
2. Integrating public support for land management
3. Supporting sustainable deer management

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### Purpose

To provide the board with a briefing on our approach and progress in delivery of these three National Park Plan priorities for Action.

### Executive Summary

These three priorities for action draw together the work of a wide range of partners across natural and cultural heritage and land management. Delivery is progressing well, with 12 out of 15 outcomes on track to be delivered by 2012 with current resources and work in-hand.

Delivery of these priorities relies on working through others, especially land managers, but also public bodies and the NGO sector. The biodiversity and landscapes programme is delivering both a long-term framework for conservation and enhancement and significant projects aimed at priority species and habitats. The land management support programme is seeking to target proactive advice and support in order to help land managers deliver the aims of the Park. The sustainable deer management programme brings together the breadth of interests in deer management to reduce conflict and seek ways to deliver both environmental and socio-economic benefits from deer in the Park.

Across all three, the themes of improved communication, using the Park as a place to be innovative, and connecting research, policy and practice run through our approach to co-ordinating these programmes.

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## NATIONAL PARK PLAN PRIORITIES FOR ACTION – 1, 2, AND 3 BRIEFING PAPER

### Background

1. The National Park Plan (2007) set out seven priorities for action that have since guided the work of CNPA and partners. This briefing paper provides an introduction to three of these priorities:
  - a) Conserving and enhancing biodiversity and landscapes
  - b) Integrating public support for land management
  - c) Supporting sustainable deer management
2. The National Park Plan sets out the management framework and priorities for all those with a part to play in managing the Park. Though only public sector partners signed up explicitly to delivering it, the private and voluntary sectors are integral to its delivery and have played a significant and successful part to date. The CNPA's corporate plan sets out the particular contributions that CNPA are making to deliver these priorities, over and above our co-ordination role.

### Purpose of Priorities

3. **Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Landscapes** is a priority because these qualities underpin the area's designation as a National Park. To conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Park needs active management. By bringing a focus to this as a priority in the National Park Plan the intention is to lay the basis for long term conservation and enhancement of the special qualities and stimulate action by a range of partners.
4. **Integrating Public Support for Land Management** is a priority because the management of land is one of the primary influences on the shape of the Park – its special qualities, appearance and economy. By bringing a focus to this as a priority in the National Park Plan the intention is to develop a more co-ordinated and targeted system of support that helps land managers to deliver the aims of the Park, a key mechanism for influencing the long term management of the National Park.
5. **Supporting Sustainable Deer Management** is a priority because deer management is one of the most significant influences on the habitats of the National Park and a key element of many estate businesses. There has in the past been controversy and conflict over differing objectives for deer management. By bringing a focus to this as a priority in the National Park Plan the intention is to improve communication, reduce conflict and reconcile multiple objectives, so as to enhance the habitats of the Park while delivering socio-economic outcomes.
6. The five-year outcomes that describe what we seek to achieve through each priority by 2012 are set out in Annex I.

7. These three priorities contribute particularly to the following **Scottish Government outcomes**:
- a) (2) *We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.*
  - b) (12) *We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.*

## A Collective Approach to Delivery

8. CNPA's enabling approach to delivery means that a significant part of our role has been to bring together, support and facilitate the most effective structures and mechanisms to deliver these outcomes. CNPA does not control or direct the management of any land – 75% of land in the National Park is privately owned, with the remainder owned by NGOs and public bodies. To achieve these outcomes, we therefore need to work through these individuals and organisations. This means setting in place effective policy frameworks, support and advice mechanisms, but also building direct relationships with land managers to draw on the range of motivations and objectives that each land manager and partner organisation has.
9. There is a range of partners with responsibility for delivering these priorities. A single **Delivery Team** covers the three priorities with representatives of:
- a) Land managers (represented through SRPBA and NFUS)
  - b) Scottish Natural Heritage
  - c) Forestry Commission Scotland
  - d) Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
  - e) Historic Scotland
  - f) Royal Commission for Historical and Ancient Monuments in Scotland
  - g) British Geological Survey
  - h) Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Division
  - i) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
  - j) Macaulay Institute
  - k) UHI Centre for Mountain Studies
  - l) Local Authorities
  - m) Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership
10. There are three **forums** that make particular contributions to these three priorities:
- a) *Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group* – a key part of our approach to delivering the sustainable deer management priority, CDAG brings together the range of different interests in deer management to advise each other and CNPA on furthering sustainable deer management in the Park.
  - b) *Cairngorms Farmers Forum* – a networking forum for farmers, facilitated by CNPA, on which we and others can draw for advice and information.
  - c) *Land Management Forum* – a forum bringing together the range of land management interests from private, public and voluntary sectors to share experience, discuss current and forthcoming issues and advise CNPA and others on National Park Plan implementation (chaired by SRPBA).

## Overview of Delivery

11. Annex I provides an extract from the most recent monitoring report on National Park Plan delivery showing progress towards the five-year outcomes. This includes the milestones for 2012 that were agreed through the mid-term review of the National Park Plan carried out in 2009/10, which agreed the focus for the remaining period of delivery to 2012. The monitoring report reflects the work of all partners involved in delivering these priorities, not just CNPA.
12. Overall, it shows the following:

<i>Priority for Action</i>	<i>No. of outcomes on track to be delivered</i>	<i>No. of outcomes needing more work/resource</i>
Biodiversity and Landscapes	6	3
Land Management Support	2	1
Sustainable Deer Management	4	1

## Discussion on approach and delivery

### Conserving and Enhancing the Park's Biodiversity and Landscapes

#### *Developing the framework for long-term delivery*

13. A significant element of this priority (and focus for CNPA's own contribution) in the first five year plan is the establishment of a robust policy and planning framework, especially through development planning and management, to lay the basis for long-term conservation and enhancement, including:
  - a) Contributing to the Local Plan including policies setting high standards of natural and cultural heritage conservation and enhancement;
  - b) Developing Supplementary Planning Guidance to support delivery of Local Plan policies (eg natural heritage, water resources, sustainable design guide);
  - c) Assessing biodiversity and landscape value of potential sites for the Local Development Plan;
  - d) Developing the Landscape Framework to provide a robust and transparent tool to inform landscape planning and management decisions (including preparation of a new Landscape Character Assessment);
  - e) Developing an assessment and methodology to conserve and enhance wildness, one of the principal special qualities of the National Park;
  - f) Establishing the Cairngorms Biodiversity Recording System, to improve data collation and availability and engage people in biodiversity;
  - g) Baseline surveys of key habitats including in-bye grassland, wetlands to address gaps in data required for future land use planning.
14. *Development management casework* is also key to delivering this priority. CNPA has an agreed protocol with SNH to avoid duplication in casework effort and provide clarity to applicants. Where an application affects a designated site or a European Protected Species, SNH takes the lead in providing casework advice. For wider natural and cultural heritage matters, CNPA takes the lead on casework advice. In practice this means that CNPA staff lead the advice on the majority of applications

received. (The ecology and landscape advisers allocate approximately 75% of their time to casework.) Over the last year significant time and resources has been invested in following through the planning committee's objections to windfarms around the edges of the National Park in public inquiries, seeking to establish clarity on policy issues including the setting of the National Park which will have long term implications. The CNPA is also actively involved to ensure the obligations for the Beaulay to Denny overhead power line are met. This includes working with SSE on the rationalisation and mitigation schemes as well as the two liaison groups set up as a requirement of the approval.

### **Historic Environment**

15. The history of land use has had a profound effect on the biodiversity and landscape of the Park. Much of this was captured in the 2007 Cultural Heritage Audit. Work in this direction has continued with the development of the Landscape Character Assessment which used the National Historic Land use Assessment in an innovative way.
16. In 2009 the 2 year Community Heritage Project was established and this delivers support for community led heritage projects through a project officer. The second year of the project will continue with project support and establish a heritage strategy to direct the work of the CNPA and partners.

### **Delivering Conservation projects**

17. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership is a key mechanism for delivering biodiversity conservation and enhancement. To date LBAP has operated a community grant scheme to encourage people to engage with their local biodiversity as well as managing a series of more strategic biodiversity projects.
18. Significant projects underway include:
  - a) Cairngorms Rare Plant Project - conserving four key plant species for which the Park is nationally significant through working with land managers to produce habitat management regimes to ensure the populations remain viable.
  - b) Cairngorms Wildcat Project – conserving wildcat numbers within the Park through working with keepers and the Cats Protection League to control feral cat populations and raise awareness. ([www.highlandtiger.co.uk](http://www.highlandtiger.co.uk))
  - c) Raptor track – A range of raptors has been tagged across the part with satellite receivers and their progress is plotted online by the Highland Wildlife Foundation to inform management and planning, and to engage people.
  - d) Invasive plant survey of Donside – this survey completes the coverage of similar work by RAFTS and Fishery Boards as a first step prior to active removal and management in riparian corridors.
  - e) In-by Survey of Glen Livet and Donside – Grassland survey to these areas to supplement previous surveys elsewhere in the Park.
  - f) Watervole Project – the second phase of a successful watervole conservation project embedding management within the keeping and river fishery communities.

19. The LBAP grant scheme has given funds for a number of smaller projects, for example:
  - a) An Aspen nursery – run by volunteers, this group produces nursery stock from local clones and seedlings
  - b) Reed management on farms – giving farmers access to reed cutting services in key wetland areas.
  
20. **Future Directions**
  - a) Reviewing and refreshing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and partnership
  - b) Establish a stronger strategic cultural heritage partnership with local authorities
  - c) Consideration of a Heritage/Conservation Trust mechanism to build on the foundations of the LBAP and Community Heritage Project in a way that will engage more people and organisations in helping to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Park.
  - d) The next National Park Plan will be able to draw on the significant baseline survey and analysis work carried out so far in order to target action to conserve and enhance the special qualities.

## **Integrating Public Support for Land Management**

### ***Making the national support system work for the Park***

21. The National Park Plan was prepared prior to the launch of the current Scotland Rural Development Programme which is the most significant public investment in land management and one of the most significant influences on land management decisions (approximately £10M has been invested into land-based businesses within the Park through rural development contracts over the last two years). As currently structured, this national programme of land management support does not help to deliver the more co-ordinated and targeted system of support we seek to help deliver the aims of the Park. In particular, the split of the National Park into three RPAC areas for Rural Development Contracts means that there are three different sets of priorities for public investment in land management overlaid with no reference to the National Park Plan. In practice, the broad nature of these priorities also means there is a lack of targeting of resources to the most important priorities in the National Park.
  
22. With financial support from Cairngorms LEADER, CNPA employed two land management support officers for two years from 2008-2010. Their role was to help land managers make the most of the SRDP opportunities available, and to promote specific opportunities that would help deliver the priorities of the National Park Plan. Although successful in providing advice and support to over 60 farm or estate businesses, the structure of the rural development contract scheme made it difficult to deliver significant added value from this resource, so at the end of the funding period these roles came to an end.
  
23. Recognising CNPA's limited influence on the shape of the current national programme of support through SRDP, we are now focusing our efforts on influencing the next round of SRDP due for implementation in 2013. This work is being carried out jointly with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park

Authority, with a view to ensuring the next programme delivers more effectively for both of Scotland's National Parks.

### **Training for Land-Based Businesses**

24. The provision of training is one of the most significant ways in which CNPA and partners can influence land management practice. It has also come to be recognised as one of the principal benefits to land managers of being in the National Park.
25. The training project has been in existence since 2004 and in that time over £1 million has been invested in training in the National Park and more than 5,500 people have received training. These people are mostly employed in the land based sector and have chosen their training. The current funding tranche runs out in the current financial year and the Board have recently approved funding applications and a revised structure for the next phase of the training programme.

### **Catchment Management**

26. CNPA is providing significant support to catchment management groups, both financial and though staff time, because we see these as effective partnership mechanisms that have the potential to deliver a more integrated approach to land management planning and support. We support the Dee catchment management group by financial grant tied to outcomes, and provide similar support in addition to being the employer for the Spey Catchment Management Officer (from October 2010). We also provide a lower level of financial support for delivery of the South Esk catchment management plan.
27. While these partnerships are delivering a significant range of projects within their catchments – eg riparian woodland establishment, flood management, diffuse pollution reduction – working at a catchment scale also offers good opportunities to demonstrate the regional and national value that land use in the National Park delivers – for example through flood management and water provision to significant population centres downstream.

### **Low Carbon Land Management**

28. This has emerged as a priority area during the course of the current National Park Plan period, in response to the increased political drivers to address climate change.
29. Specific initiatives have included:
  - Green Farm Pilot* – 16 farms trialling low carbon farming practices;
  - Publication of Farmers Guide to Climate Change* – through a CNPA-SAOS partnership
  - Low Carbon Estates* – 5 estates investigating different ways to reduce their carbon footprint;
  - Woodfuel Action Plan* – a significant partnership plan assessing the supply, demand and opportunities for woodfuel in the Park.
30. The recently approved Food for Life Action Plan also contributes significantly to land management outcomes, although it is managed through CNPA's programme 'Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable'.
31. **Future Directions**
  - a) Influencing the next SRDP programme

- b) Likely focus on a low carbon economy, including land use, in the next National Park Plan
- c) Emerging focus on woodland expansion in context of national targets
- d) Opportunity to show how the national Land Use Strategy can be applied at a Park scale

## Supporting Sustainable Deer Management

### ***Facilitating the Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group***

32. The core of our work to support sustainable deer management in the National Park has been facilitating the Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group (CDAG). The group emerged at the time the first National Park Plan was being consulted upon. At that time it was already recognised that there is a need for good communication between all those with an interest in deer and their management. Deer managers across the Park were already meeting together in one of six Deer Management Groups and in the Association of Cairngorms Deer Management Groups, however they and others recognised that to move on the public debate surrounding deer it was necessary to form a group that represented public, private and third sector interests. CNPA played a key role in setting up CDAG in 2006 and continues to facilitate the group today. For CNPA, CDAG is a successful example of enabling an effective mechanism in a subject where we have little or no control but recognise there are public, private, local and national interests that need to be reconciled
33. Paper 2: The Draft Deer Framework provides an update on progress with this Park Plan priority and provides a more detailed summary of CDAG and its role. Essentially the greatest value provided by CDAG is the gathering together of groups of people and individuals who would otherwise not normally meet and who might appear to have greatly divergent views on deer and their management. CDAG has helped to open out the debate and find a collective resolve to move it on.
34. Many of the individuals that attend CDAG do so entirely at their own cost. There have been a number of key outputs from CDAG over the last four years (summarised briefly below) but the Deer Framework is the most important to date because it condenses over four years of debate and discussion and moves it into something more concrete that may be applied across the National Park.

### **35. *Key developments supported through CDAG:***

Advice Park Plan priority for supporting sustainable deer management	2006
Monitoring 'Joint Working' on Designated sites	Ongoing
Assessing social-economic impacts of deer reductions	2007
Assessing community interest in deer	2007
Response to DCS consultation on Deer Strategy	2008
Start planning Deer (Management) Framework	2008
Research into Sika Hybridisation	2009
Site visit to Glen Feshie	2009
Start drafting Deer Framework	2009
Advice on interpretation and signage	2010
Site visit to Abernethy	2010
Advice on 'objective mapping' proposals	2010



36. Alongside the Deer Framework, the emerging focus is on developing mapping methods to help provide on an estate by estate basis a visual representation of deer managers' objectives, deer densities, movements and preferred areas.

### **Promoting the National Park as a Place to be Innovative**

37. Across these three priorities, as with the other priorities of the National Park Plan, we encourage others, whether government bodies, voluntary or private sector, to use the National Park as a place to develop and test new ideas that can inform wider rural policy and practice. We also promote the opportunity to connect policy, research and practice through the land management networks established in the Park – eg through demonstration days.
38. Recent examples of partners taking up this opportunity successfully include:
- a) Proposed pilot of Wildlife Estates Scotland initiative led by SRPBA;
  - b) Research on land management implications of sustainable flood management informing SEPA task and finish group;
  - c) Significant focus on the Park as a place for and subject of research by the Macaulay Institute and UHI Centre for Mountain Studies;
  - d) Emerging pilot on ecosystem approach with SNH

### **Key Staff Contacts**

*Biodiversity and Landscapes programme* – Matthew Hawkins  
*Sustainable Deer Management/Land Management Support programmes* – Will Boyd-Wallis  
*Catchment management and low carbon land use* – Fiona Chalmers  
*LBAP officers* – Justin Prigmore/Stephen Corcoran  
*Landscape Adviser* – Frances Thin  
*Ecology Adviser* – Karen Couper  
*Community Heritage Project* – Fiona McLean  
*Wildcat Project* – David Hetherington

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