

Annex 1

Cairngorms Tourism Strategy – Mid Term Review In the Context of the European Charter

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Introduction

1. In March 2005 The Cairngorms National Park was awarded the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (hereafter called the Charter) by EUROPARC. This was based on the submission of a Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism (2005-10) which had been prepared for the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) by The Tourism Company. The Strategy and Action Plan was seen as a basis for sustainable tourism development and management for the Cairngorms as a whole and for coordinated action by a variety of stakeholders, not just the CNPA. Responsibility for the strategy was allocated to the VISIT Forum.
2. This paper provides a mid-term review of the Strategy and Action Plan. Its purpose is:
 - a) To assess progress made to date
 - b) To consider how current policies, structures and activities relate to the needs and expectations of the Charter and whether the Cairngorms appears to be in line for successful re-application
 - c) To suggest where efforts and resources may best be focused over the coming two years.
3. This review has been based on a short consultancy assignment. It has involved:
 - a) Receiving and reading a set of relevant documents, including recent plans, papers, tourist information and promotional material
 - b) A two day visit to the Cairngorms. This involved meetings with: CNPA officers, Board members and Forum chair; representatives of the private sector (Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms DMO, Tomintoul and Glenlivet Highland Holidays); and a representative of Scottish Natural Heritage. It also included a brief inspection of certain activity on the ground.
 - c) Telephone interviews with Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, and VisitScotland (in the Highland region).
 - d) A short assessment of information and material received.

4. This is an informal review, providing observations based on the information and material provided. No formal verification of activity has been undertaken. Comments relating to the Charter requirements are based on our considerable engagement with the Charter process, but should not be taken to represent the views of EUROPARC or to prejudge any possible outcome of reapplication.
5. This review paper has been structured around headings which reflect the points we were asked to address in our brief from the CNPA, namely: the implications of the current policy context and related delivery structures; business engagement and certification (in the context of Part 2 of the Charter); progress with the various elements of the Strategy and Action Plan; and the application of indicators and monitoring. A final section sums up our thoughts on priorities to address.
6. Comments made in the paper partly relate to issues concerning Charter requirements and partly reflect our own reaction to the situation presented to us and observations that may be useful to CNPA and its partners.

Policy context and delivery structures

7. In this section we consider the current policy and action framework for the Park and the associated structures for external engagement. The Charter is particularly concerned that sustainable tourism in parks should be driven by agreed strategies and action plans and that all relevant stakeholders are engaged in their development and execution, facilitated by appropriate structures. During our visit it became clear that these are important issues currently for the Cairngorms, owing to the advent of relatively new frameworks for delivery related to the Park Plan and the emergence of a range of bodies engaged in tourism marketing and other services.

Tourism strategy and action planning

8. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, drawn up in 2005, was specifically based on the requirements of the Charter for documents of this kind, in terms of the analysis undertaken, the orientation of the strategic objectives and the coverage of actions. We understand that the Strategy and Action Plan provided an important basis for agreeing and moving forward with actions in the first period following the strategy's launch.
9. During our visit we were encouraged that the CNPA staff had been able to relate recent and current activity back to the action plan framework. Being able to show how progress has been made within the context and framework of the originally approved plan will be important for the verification process at the time of reapplication for the Charter.

10. The advent of the Park Plan has brought a new policy framework. We can understand why this has happened but it does appear to have produced some difficulties and potential confusion for tourism. This is partly because tourism is such a sizeable and multi-faceted area of activity implicated by much of CNPA's work. Clearly, tourism should not dictate the architecture of the policy framework and we cannot comment on this overall within the whole context of the operation of the organisation. However, we suggest that the current situation may need to be reviewed and clarified.
11. It is very good that the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy have been largely reproduced in the Park Plan. This helps to mainstream them and underlines their importance within the wider context of the Park. The Charter encourages close synergy between sustainable tourism strategies and wider park management plans, and the Cairngorms is well able to demonstrate this in principle.
12. The fact that all the sustainable tourism objectives have been placed under one of the three headline strategic objectives *Enjoying and Understanding the Park* at least means that they appear all together. This works alright in the context of the Park Plan as a document, partly because the links with other objectives can be shown by cross-referencing. However, problems do start to arise beyond this, both in terms of the consequences for delivery structures (see later) and for action planning.
13. Clearly all three of the headline strategic objectives in the Park Plan are relevant to tourism. Most notable is the relationship to *Living and Working in the Park*, given that tourism is a dominant sector of the economy and the source of much or most of the work. A number of the objectives under *Conserving and Enhancing the Park* also relate strongly to tourism, especially with respect to the principles and interests of the Charter which are partly focussed on the relationship between tourism and the conservation of landscape, nature and heritage and ensuring adequate protection and visitor management is in place.
14. Turning to the Park Plan's Priorities for Action and the seven part framework for them, some of the actions identified in the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan relate to *Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable*. However, at least as many if not more relate to *Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park*, including the very critical areas of information, branding and marketing so closely related to the concerns of the private sector. Some actions also tie in to other priority areas, such as outdoor access.
15. Looking at the specific actions listed under these priorities in the Park Plan, it is possible to see the influence of the actions as expressed in the

Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan but many of the actions have been cast rather differently. This may be partly because the framework on the one hand included all businesses together with tourism and on the other covers interpretation, understanding and education for all, including residents, without being focussed on communication with existing or potential tourists.

16. We also note that an Action Programme and Monitoring Framework has been produced for *Raising Awareness and Understanding* based on the actions listed in the Park Plan. We are not sure whether a similar programming document has been produced for *Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable*. We are also not sure how, under either Priority Area, this programming and monitoring relates back to the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.
17. Does any of this matter? After all, the work has to be grouped and divided up somehow and much of the activity is bound to be inter-related. To answer this, one needs to consider whether external partners and stakeholders, and to some extent the CNPA staff, are fully clear about the framework and the actions being taken to deliver sustainable tourism – and who is doing what. The Charter calls for a strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism, drawn up, ‘owned’ and implemented by the NPA and wider stakeholders (especially tourism enterprises), which is clear and well known to everyone. It is difficult for us to judge whether this is actually the case now in the Cairngorms. Our limited discussions with private sector representatives suggest that there may be some confusion and we are not sure we can say that everyone feels that they are pulling together behind one plan.
18. Turning to the requirements of Charter renewal, EUROPARC will require there to be a dedicated sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. Essentially this should be a stand alone document but occasionally it has been deemed acceptable to have this as a discrete and entire part of a larger strategy and action plan. The sustainable tourism strategy should be based on a renewed assessment of markets, economic and community needs, environmental pressures, enterprise opportunities, etc. We think there could be a problem if the application to EUROPARC was based on cross-referral to actions located in different parts of a Park Plan and separated action programmes. Essentially, there will need to be a pulling together of actions relating to tourism in one place as the Cairngorms moves towards reapplication.
19. Clearly, there are good reasons why policy and programmes within CNPA are structured as they are. As we said above, tourism cannot dictate this. However, in the light of this and eventual upcoming Charter requirements, we suggest that it makes sense to keep hold of a comprehensive, cross-cutting set of action headings for tourism

spanning the relevant CNPA Priorities for Action. This could relate back to the original Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, though modified to take account of changing circumstances and views. To some extent, this may be happening anyway, and as we said earlier we were very impressed with the way the CNPA staff reported progress during our visit within the framework of the initial action plan.

20. Greater clarity of actions for tourism within a comprehensive tourism focussed framework is likely to be important in keeping all tourism related stakeholders on board and signed up to park-centred sustainable tourism development and management. This is also partly about structures, which are discussed next.

Delivery structures for sustainable tourism

21. The Charter requires that:
"A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established between the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. Links with regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained."
This forum should also play a central role in overseeing the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.
22. When the Charter was awarded to the Cairngorms this requirement was met by the VISIT Forum. Its breadth of membership appeared to cover the relevant stakeholder groups. However, we understand that over time participation in the Forum dwindled and there was a lack of continuity. Also, new liaison, communication and delivery structures were introduced around the Park Plan framework with three sizeable Advisory Forums formed to take a strategic view related to the three headline strategic objectives and seven Delivery Teams formed to facilitate joint working on the Priorities for Action.
23. As far as the Charter is concerned, there should not be a problem with this provided that it can be demonstrated that the various stakeholders interests are genuinely represented in implementing the strategy, through a regularly meeting body. Arguably, the Delivery Team for *Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable* should qualify in this regard, as it includes the CNPA, the Chamber of Commerce and the DMOs (representing the private sector), local authorities, the Enterprise Networks (e.g. Scottish Enterprise Grampian providing also a regional dimension), VisitScotland (providing a national link) and the Association of Cairngorms Communities (providing the required communities representation). EUROPARC may point to the desirability of including conservation interests outwith the CNPA, though this is unlikely to be a sticking point. In this regard thought might be given to the relationship with Scottish Environment Link and the Cairngorms Campaign.

24. However, we suggest that further thought should be given to the functioning of this structure. We heard some concerns expressed that the above mentioned Delivery Team had not met since last December. A further issue to address is the coverage of that Delivery Team as against the one for *Raising Awareness and Understanding*, bearing in mind the points raised earlier. The Charter might expect a reasonably comprehensive coverage of tourism by a single body playing the role of the required 'permanent forum or equivalent arrangement', rather than fragmentation. More important than the Charter, though, is the question of whether this is working well for stakeholder groups. We detected a certain amount of confusion about the coverage of the different Teams (and indeed the Advisory Forums) amongst people we consulted. Clarification is needed and perhaps some rationalisation.
25. The concept of wider strategic Forums and more focused, tactical Delivery Teams appears to make sense. We imagine that EUROPARC would credit the wider engagement that this brings. Broadly, people seem to understand this division and are happy with it. The chair of the *Enjoying and Understanding* Forum appeared to be confident about its role and contribution, while recognising the need for links with the other Forums. It is perhaps too early to judge whether it is working. A greater concern is whether the Delivery Team is in fact delivering – there was some uncertainty about this amongst those we spoke to, with some people being very happy with progress and others less so.
26. A central issue around the performance, perceived or otherwise, of the Delivery Team(s) is the extent to which the personnel on it are genuinely representing groups of stakeholders and ensuring their tie in to the Team's work and outcomes. We heard of concerns about a disconnection between the aspirations of the CNPA for tourism, which are broadly supported, and actual delivery on the ground, notably where this requires private sector take up. To some extent, this is as much to do with the quite complex structure of private sector networks and bodies across the area, as with the CNPA's structures. This is referred to in the next section.

Enterprise engagement and certification

27. In this section we look first at the structures for engaging tourism enterprises with the national park and then more specifically at issues relating to sustainability accreditation, branding and Part 2 of the Charter.

Tourism enterprise networks and bodies

28. Currently there are many networks and organisations within and around the Cairngorms which are bringing tourism enterprises together

at various levels and in various ways. As far as the Charter is concerned, it is not prescriptive about this provided there is a working system in place for linking tourism enterprises with the park and the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan – there can be as many or as few organisations as is felt to be best for the area.

29. It is difficult for us, given the limited nature of our contract, to consider in detail the functioning of private sector engagement in the Cairngorms and to make recommendations. This would require much more time spent on consultation and assessment than we have been asked or are able to provide. During our visit, it was clear that many people in the area are devoting energy to trying to get the best possible structure and it is a much debated issue. However, we make a few observations below.
30. Leaving aside any consideration of what organisations may exist at the moment, we feel that there are now strong arguments for there to be one overall body (which could be a single organisation or formalised network) representing private sector tourism enterprises in the Cairngorms and working in close harmony with the CNPA on the development and promotion of the Cairngorms brand and the delivery of successful, sustainable tourism and all the other elements of the tourism strategy. We feel that this is the best way to maximise on the great opportunity that the national park designation of this area presents.
31. A cross-park body would not prevent the promotion, within the (greater) Cairngorms area, of individual destinations such as Aviemore and Deeside, which would be encouraged to relate specifically to their individual strengths including outdoor activities and heritage, while underlining that there is a mix of all these strengths in the Cairngorms area as a whole.
32. It would be appropriate for such a body to have flexible boundaries as far as its membership is concerned. This would be particularly important for Deeside as it contains many enterprises east of the park boundary which can benefit from association with the Cairngorms National Park.
33. A strong single Cairngorms body should also seek to engage powerfully with VisitScotland, ensuring maximum coverage for the area and its national park status within national and international promotion. It should also seek to address more localised market opportunities, in all directions, including drawing visitors into Deeside and to the park from the Aberdeen gateway.
34. We detected quite strong support for a Cairngorms wide coming together, within both the public and private sector. It is difficult for us to

comment in detail on how this might be effected through the Chamber of Commerce, the two DMOs and other interests.

35. At another level, we believe there is merit in fostering local networks of tourism enterprises, working alongside local communities. There are successful examples of this in Tomintoul/Glen Livet and Blair Athol, both areas not actively covered by the two DMOs, but there are also groupings of enterprises and community initiatives in places like Braemar and Nethybridge as well as other locations. Internationally, smaller community-based models are seen as providing a useful way of harnessing energy and enthusiasm and improving the quality of the visitor experience on the ground, which can then nest loosely within a larger destination management/ marketing structure. There is also scope for sectoral or thematic networks or associations.
36. A critical principle in determining a way forward is that private sector enterprises should decide what works best for them. Imposing a structure from above and by outside agencies should be avoided. The objective at the end of the day should be to get a higher proportion of businesses engaging with each other and with the destination, improving performance and standards across the board.

Certification, recognition and Charter Part 2

37. In our brief we were asked to comment on the application of environmental criteria in the relationship between the park and tourism businesses and how this relates to Part 2 of the Charter.
38. We believe that CNPA has been laudably bold in its promotion of environmental certification (through GTBS) and its linking of this to the Cairngorms brand. It is probable that the Cairngorms has one of the highest proportions of environmentally certificated tourism enterprises of any other park in Europe.
39. Individual enterprises are rightly asking what certification brings for them and are demanding greater recognition of their achievement in the market place. All promotional material should push this and VisitScotland should be encouraged to give it higher profile. At the same time the practical benefits of environmental management should be put over clearly to enterprises – the CNPA and its partners appear to be adopting exactly the right approach here, for example through the forthcoming conference/forum on this subject.
40. We believe that the CNPA has been right to relate environmental certification to the Cairngorms brand, as a way of underpinning the brand promise of a place which cares for its superlative environment. We detected overall support for this approach from all quarters. However, there does appear to have been some disquiet about the

way Cairngorms branding has been handled and projected; we received one comment that this should have been left to the private sector. We believe that it is absolutely appropriate for CNPA to take a leading position on the use and application of the brand – it is the organisation ultimately responsible for the guardianship of Cairngorms brand values. However, sensitive, clear communication is obviously important.

41. In the light of the strong steps taken in this field by the CNPA and the current sensitivity in working with enterprises and avoiding confusion, it is understandable that CNPA may not wish to introduce Part 2 of the Charter (which recognises individual enterprises under the Charter). This is their call, not EUROPARC's. Engagement in Part 2 is voluntary and would not affect the chance of the Cairngorms having the Charter renewed as a park. However, we would encourage the CNPA to keep abreast of Part 2 developments, continue to contribute to discussion on its roll out within the EUROPARC Atlantic Isles section, and consider whether it might be used helpfully in the Cairngorms in due course.

Action Plan progress

42. In this section we comment briefly on progress on the delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan to date, based principally on information supplied to us by CNPA staff. Rather than looking in detail at individual actions, we make comments more generally under the nine functional objectives of the Strategy/Plan to which individual actions relate.

Environmental Management and Conservation

43. Overall there appears to have been very good progress in this area and in some activities the Cairngorms is in a leading position within Europe. We would particularly point to the good work with land managers, the furtherance of environmental certification (GTBS) and training/support for this, improving recycling opportunities, and approaches to the use of car parking charges.
44. CNPA needs to point clearly to a few simple ways in which it is monitoring environmental impact. Possibly, previous work on indicators has been too complex and ambitious. Simple measurement of habitat loss in pressured areas, footpath erosion, water and air quality, landscape degradation/ building spread, and visitor reaction (to quality of environment), could be pursued.
45. It is important to keep a firm grip on development control in the interests of sustainable tourism.
46. A more proactive and systematic approach could perhaps be taken towards generating support from enterprises and visitors for conservation, e.g. through visitor payback schemes. Support should be obtained from private sector groupings here.
47. In general, we feel that a number of these points relate to the level of private enterprise buy-in to the environment and conservation agenda. Enterprise networks and organisations should give this high priority and demonstrate their commitment to working with CNPA in this field. More could be done to clarify the benefits to enterprises from this kind of engagement, including helping them gain greater marketing advantage. This could be achieved through strong promotion of the Cairngorms brand in the context of environmental quality and, by association, of individual enterprises backing the brand through their certification and actions.

Working together

48. Issues relating to this objective have been mainly covered earlier in this report. Rather than pointing to progress exactly, it is perhaps more accurate to refer to close engagement with an evolving situation.
49. Good relations have been maintained with VisitScotland (who have been fulsome in their praise for the work of CNPA) despite rapidly changing circumstances within that organisation. The Cairngorms could perhaps seek to secure greater benefits now from VS, including higher profile.
50. The Strategy and Action Plan talked of developing communication between CNPA and individual enterprises. With hindsight this was perhaps unrealistic and it is more appropriate to achieve this through trade bodies. The CNPA appears to have built up quite good relations with both the Chamber of Commerce and the DMOs as well as smaller bodies and is well placed to encourage closer working together all round, in the ways outlined above. CNPA should work with these bodies to continue to strengthen delivery of park related messages and awareness, through media, events, websites, email and print.
51. The Cairngorms Tourism Conference appears to have been quite a successful event, now in its fourth year.

Marketing

52. Although comments we received suggest that there have been some problems with communicating policy on Cairngorms brand usage and getting people behind it, to us the application of the brand appears quite impressive. We applaud the establishment of the brand management group. The concept of family brands makes sense to us. The examples given to us of how the application of the brand has been used to leverage good practice, for example in design of print, are interesting. The roll out of the brand should be continued and supported.
53. The review of information delivery – for example looking at awareness of print and response to it – is a sensible step and provides good guidance for improvement. The Visitor Guide now appears to be well established, with the support of VisitScotland. Some aspects of its usability could be further considered, for example indexing attractions on a map.
54. The Action Plan pointed to the need and opportunity to influence how others, including destination guides, website and commercial print, treated the Cairngorms. We appreciate the sophisticated approach pursued through the Interpretation Guide, but feel that this may not be picked up by some information producers. We would suggest taking a

closer look at how others are covering the Cairngorms and possibly seeking to influence this directly.

55. Having a superlative Cairngorms website remains a key marketing requirement. This was emphasised in the Strategy and Action Plan. Progress here has been very slow. The Web Portal approach, as outlined in the recent Board paper, makes good sense to us. We were happy with the samples of web-pages for the portal that we saw. It was stressed to us by some that this should not be just a 'thin' portal with a very quick pass through to other sites but should promote creatively the special qualities of the park and the richness and variety of opportunity for exploration and activities. We fully concur with this.
56. The issue of how the portal points to private business is a difficult one. A principle to bear in mind is that economic sustainability of a high quality site will depend on a mechanism for financial input by the beneficiaries – the private sector enterprises. This is recognised by Aviemore and the Cairngorms DMO. Ideally, one should look to the coverage of commercial product in the Cairngorms matching what they have achieved with their site in terms of quality and approach, but spanning a wider area and constituency of enterprises. This has a bearing on the benefits of moving to one entity for private sector engagement in marketing for the whole area, discussed earlier.
57. External promotion of the Cairngorms as a destination arguably remains a weakness. The original Action Plan emphasised the need for maximum exposure by Visit Scotland and this remains a priority. Aside from this, the problem is partly structural, in that the CNPA is not really a marketing body and sees promotion as primarily the role of the private sector, yet the private sector marketing networks (essentially the DMOs) are covering different areas and are not park-focussed. The CPNA needs to work with them (ideally as a single entity) on a strategic and tactical marketing plan for the Cairngorms.

Information and interpretation

58. Good progress has been made in this area across a range of activities. With some, such as the newly completed interpretation guidance, it is too early to judge the outcome.
59. Much of the work has led to greater visual identity for the Park and a stronger information presence. This includes the striking park boundary signing. We understand work is now addressing pre-arrival signage. The impressive panorama display boards effectively serve a number of purposes, putting across the scale of the Park and opportunities for exploring, while also helping to orientate the visitor.

60. We were pleased to see the priority being given to enhancing the Park presence within TICs. Attention to detail is important here, for example in relating display material to information racks and hard information to take away.
61. We believe that a very high priority in information delivery should be given to the role of enterprises and individual people who interface most frequently with visitors - accommodation hosts, receptionists, publicans, transport operators etc. Action has been taken to improve their knowledge of the Park and material available to them, through the Cairngorms Connections courses and literature distribution etc. However, we recommend that the take up of this be reviewed. More work could perhaps be done in this area alongside the DMOs, Chamber of Commerce and others. Related to this is pursuing the active take up of the Interpretation Guide by enterprises.

Quality and welcome

62. The Cairngorms branding has been used as a tool to underpin quality, combining quality and environmental criteria. However, we were pleased to see that the outreach is also wider than this, with work undertaken with VisitScotland on quality codes for a range of services relating to visitors and research by the Chamber of Commerce on the overall incidence of all kinds of quality and environmental recognition applied to businesses.
63. The visitor survey proposed for 2009 will provide an overall opportunity to assess quality in terms of visitor satisfaction levels. However, it is important to keep abreast of consumer reaction more regularly and so the work with DMOs on gaining more systematic visitor feedback is encouraging.
64. A number of quite specific initiatives have been undertaken in the areas of provision for people who are physically or economically disadvantaged. This is a subject identified by the Charter. It is unusual find any specific initiatives in European parks aimed at people on low incomes and to the Cairngorms on a Shoestring initiative is particularly welcome. This could be of interest to other Charter parks.
65. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy picked up some dissatisfaction with certain elements of the public realm, such as toilets. The need to work closely with local authorities on visitor related infrastructure was emphasised. Perhaps this is an area that could receive further specific attention, within the context of the Delivery Teams.

Distinctiveness and discovery

66. This is an area which has perhaps seen rather less action than some others. Some of the actions identified in the Sustainable Tourism

Strategy/AP were looked at but not pursued. The Interpretation Guidance will now provide a basis for moving forward with some creative initiatives.

67. There appears to have been some questioning of both the contents and promotion of the events programme, yet also a recognition that events can be tactically valuable in implementing a strategy of spreading tourism in space and time. They can also be good at engaging communities. There is some concern about whether events are sufficiently Cairngorms specific. This is possibly an area for a more systematic review and agreed action between different stakeholders.
68. Relatively little progress appears to have been made in diversifying the Cairngorms' product offer, including strengthening historic and cultural heritage components.
69. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy/AP pointed to the opportunity to bring out specific types of walking opportunity to attract and retain different kinds of visitor market. This whole area is covered by the Outdoor Access Strategy and its implementation. We were not able to assess this strategy from the point of view of its relationship to tourism objectives. The structural relationship between the elements within CNPA covering access and those covering tourism, including Advisory Forums and Delivery Teams, may need to be addressed.
70. We were pleased to see some take up of the proposed actions covering wildlife watching, with a tourism related element included in the priority action area related to deer management.

Enterprise and economy

71. Some specific actions have been taken in the field of business support and training linked to improving skills and promoting employment opportunities. A particular example is work by CNPA to promote vocational training and the establishment of a land-based skills qualification. However, in general this is perhaps an area where there could be more progress.
72. The provision of enterprise support rests more with enterprise companies and private sector networks, including the Chamber of Commerce and the DMOs, than with the CNPA. The Aviemore and Cairngorms DMO has established a business barometer to keep abreast of performance and is interested in pursuing more capacity building and training for enterprises, possibly in conjunction with the Chamber. There has been a skills audit and provision of business skills courses for small tourism enterprises on the Aberdeenshire side, through Scottish Enterprise and the DMO there. This area of work could benefit from more coordination.

73. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy/AP put some emphasis on strengthening links between tourism and agriculture, both through development of farm tourism and also the promotion of local produce. It also pointed to strengthening craft sales to tourists. Some relevant initiatives have been pursued, such as the Creative Cairngorms Association, but we are not clear how strongly that relates to tourism. More work might have been expected in the branding and promotion of locally sourced Cairngorms food.

Visitor management

74. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy/AP called for policies that addressed issues of carrying capacity and visitor pressure, especially in terms of impact on natural environments and the need to maintain a wilderness experience. It pointed to the need for a spatial approach to visitor management. This has largely been met by the Outdoor Access Strategy, which is partly area specific. However, again, we would suggest that there needs to be a clear link between this and actions relating to tourism, especially with respect to promotion and information.
75. A number of excellent initiatives have been taken to promote the use of public transport by visitors, including the Cairngorms Explorer booklet (with its comprehensive timetables and suggestions for linked walks and packages), the dedicated Heather Hopper bus service, the provision for carrying bikes on buses and the Badenoch and Strathspey electric vehicle project. This programme of activity could serve as an example to other parks. There is a need to ensure strong promotion to enterprises and visitors and monitoring of take up over time.
76. Further work might be done on the impact of coach borne tourism, which is important in the Cairngorms and was flagged up previously.

Community involvement

77. Although community engagement has not been a major focus of tourism activity in the Cairngorms, it has been possible to point to a number of steps taken to engage communities. The Association of Community Councils has been built in to local delivery structures, including the Delivery Teams. Some attempt has been made to gain feedback from residents about tourism ((e.g. Boat of Garten survey). Regular communication with residents about tourism has been maintained through the Parklife publication, which has also included information on tourism business that offer discounts to local people. Local community based events have been assisted with funding.

78. Although these initiatives are very worthwhile, there is a perhaps a case for a more structured approach to work at a community level on the development and delivery of sustainable tourism, which has been mentioned earlier in this report.

Indicators, monitoring and renewal of the strategy and Charter

79. A process of monitoring performance and impact is required in any destination that is serious in pursuing sustainable tourism.
80. It is a requirement of the Charter that parks use indicators and undertake monitoring, but this is quite general. Verifiers are asked "Have sufficient indicators been identified for the monitoring of the success of the strategy/action plan and can these be practically measured?". Elsewhere, the Charter asks specifically whether there is monitoring of impact on flora and fauna, whether visitor numbers in different locations are being monitored over time, and whether feedback is received from tourism enterprises. A survey of visitors is also required, to inform the strategy and action plan. Arguably, the Charter should have stronger requirements for indicators and monitoring and it is possible that EUROPARC may look at this in future. However, as it stands it is unlikely that this will be a problem for the Cairngorms on reapplication.
81. Turning to the table of Outcome Indicators for the Priorities for Action, this seems a good basis for monitoring and we have little to add to this.
82. It has been noted earlier that the Charter is equally concerned about the condition of parks for sustainable tourism – their overall environmental quality – as about the impact of tourism itself. The Biodiversity and Landscapes indicators and monitoring should therefore be seen as very relevant.
83. The list under Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable has a good balance of performance and impact indicators, covering economic and social impacts. The Raising Awareness indicators are also relevant and it is good to see their consumer focus. A few additional indicators might be added to both sets and we recommend that CNPA looks back at the Sustainable Tourism Strategy/AP document which provided a list of suggested indicator topics at the end. For example, we suggest that an indicator on use of different forms to transport to reach and explore the park might be included. Indicators on the use of various services, notably forms of information provision, might be added to assist in their evaluation and future management.
84. The proposed Visitor Survey in 2009 will be very important as a monitoring tool and adequate resources must be devoted to it. It is

also important to have a good process of obtaining feedback from enterprises.

New strategy and charter renewal

85. The timing of the reapplication for the Charter may present a few difficulties. EUROPARC is very clear that this must be based on a new sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. Reapplication is due in 2010 so the Cairngorms should work on this strategy in 2009. It is possible that this process could be put back a year, but even so EUROPARC will look for a strong justification for this. A two year delay could be problematic.
86. The scheduling of the Visitor Survey for 2009, providing results not until 2010 points to the work on the strategy in 2010 leading to a 2011 application. CNPA may need to explain why this survey cannot be brought forward.
87. More thought needs to be given to the relationship between the new Sustainable Tourism Strategy/AP and the renewed Park Plan. This should bear in mind points made earlier in the report about the current situation. Ideally, the Park Plan should set an overall direction with the detail on tourism following from this through the dedicated tourism strategy and action plan. However, given the fact that the Park Plan will not be produced until 2012 this would cause significant timing difficulties. The alternative, of producing a sustainable tourism strategy first, which is then reflected in the Park Plan, as happened last time, is possible. However, we feel that the situation of a more generic Park Plan then taking over the tourism strategy/plan should be avoided.
88. At the end of the day, there should be a clear sustainable tourism strategy and action plan, based on consultation and agreement, which indicates roles and responsibilities and to which all stakeholders are committed.

Key priorities in moving forward

89. The overall conclusion from the review is that CNPA and its partners have made very good progress on the development and management of sustainable tourism in the Cairngorms. We are impressed with what has been achieved. The Cairngorms is certainly continuing to meet the requirements of the European Charter and provides a good example for other parks. On balance, we heard a lot of praise for the work of the CNPA and the professionalism of the staff.
90. Throughout this report, attention has been drawn to various issues that should be addressed in moving forward. In this section we just summarise a number of priorities as we see them.

- a) Clarify the relationship between the different action programmes under the Park Plan as they relate to each other and to the sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. In principle, seek to work to one strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism that is clearly recognised by all stakeholders.
- b) Review and clarify the coverage and functions of the different Advisory Forums and Delivery Teams as they relate to tourism. Review make up of the teams and ensure commitment of participants. Encourage participants to relate to the constituents they represent. Ensure regular meetings.
- c) Help the private sector to decide what structures will best encourage their engagement with the Cairngorms national park. In this, the merits of private sector bodies coming together to form one body (organisation or network) for the Cairngorms as a whole should be set out.
- d) Help private sector enterprises to obtain maximum benefit from environmental management, certification and branding. Promote branded enterprise and products as actively as possible.
- e) Strengthen support from enterprises and visitors for conservation of the special qualities of the park.
- f) Seek to gain maximum exposure from VisitScotland for the Cairngorms as a national park of international standing and as a flagship of sustainable tourism.
- g) Launch and actively promote the Cairngorms web portal and ensure that it puts across strong messages about the Park and how it can be enjoyed sustainably.
- h) Work with private sector bodies on a coordinated marketing plan for the Cairngorms.
- i) Strengthen the ability of private sector tourism businesses to deliver information about the Cairngorms to their guests, including the use of the interpretation guide.
- j) Undertake further work on activities and products which put across the local distinctiveness of the Cairngorms. Place more emphasis on bringing out the historical and cultural heritage. Review the role, delivery and promotion of events. Make more of local produce.
- k) Clarify the links between the Outdoor Access Strategy and tourism, especially with respect to information and marketing.

- l) Improve coordination of business support and training.
- m) Make the most of the innovative work on public transport, through maximising awareness and promotion.
- n) Encourage community-level engagement and networking between local business.
- o) Work with the indicators and monitoring proposed for the Park Plan, with minor additions as may be appropriate. Give high priority to the upcoming visitor survey and enterprise feedback.
- p) Give careful consideration to the future timing of renewal of the sustainable tourism strategy and action plan, the reapplication for the Charter, and how this relates to the Park Plan.