

---

# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

---

## FOR DECISION

**Title:** NATIONAL PARK PLAN MID-TERM HEALTH CHECK

**Prepared by:** Gavin Miles, Strategic Policy and Planning Officer

### Purpose

To update the Board on the results and implications of the mid-term health check of the National Park Plan delivery and to agree the format of the revised National Park Forums.

### Recommendations

That the Board agree:

- a) The proposed focus for the priorities for action for the remaining two and a half years of this National Park Plan.
- b) The proposed format for the Sustainable Tourism and Land Management Forums.

### Executive Summary

This paper summarises the mid-term review of delivery of the National Park Plan. The review has been undertaken over the course of 2009 through discussions with partners through the delivery teams and individually. The purpose of the review is to take stock of delivery, make any adjustments required while there is still time to influence delivery by 2012, and ensure there remains a clear focus for CNPA and partners during the remaining period of this National Park Plan.

There have been several changes in context since the plan was prepared, notably recession and constrained public finances and the increasing importance of climate change as a policy driver. Overall, 70% of the plan's outcomes are on track to be substantially achieved by 2012. For these, and the remaining 30% where more work is required, clear deliverables have been identified in Annex I, setting a clear focus for effort on what we realistically expect to be achieved by 2012. This also provides a transparent basis for reporting on delivery in 2012.

There are a number of implications for CNPA's own corporate and operational planning, including a transition of delivery responsibility to the Cairngorms Business Partnership and associated changes to our staff deployment, the priority of implementing the Local Plan and associated guidance, the need to engage partners in options for land management support 2013 onwards, a refocusing of our priorities on housing and new reporting on climate change work.

The paper also seeks the Board's approval to the arrangements for new forums on land management and sustainable tourism following the decision in May 2009 to change the format of our previous advisory forums. The arrangements for the two forums are tailored to the particular needs of each group of participants and, in the case of the sustainable tourism forum, the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

---

## NATIONAL PARK PLAN MID-TERM HEALTH CHECK FOR DECISION

### Introduction

1. This paper summarises the results and implications of the National Park Plan mid-term health check and provides the third 4-monthly monitoring report on National Park Plan delivery. It also seeks Board approval for the format of the revised advisory forums.
2. The paper serves a different purpose to National Park Plan Annual Progress Report. The Annual Progress Report provides examples of action, successes and progress through each priority for action. This paper takes a more thorough overview of progress towards the outcomes across the National Park Plan.

### Purpose of the Mid-term Health-check

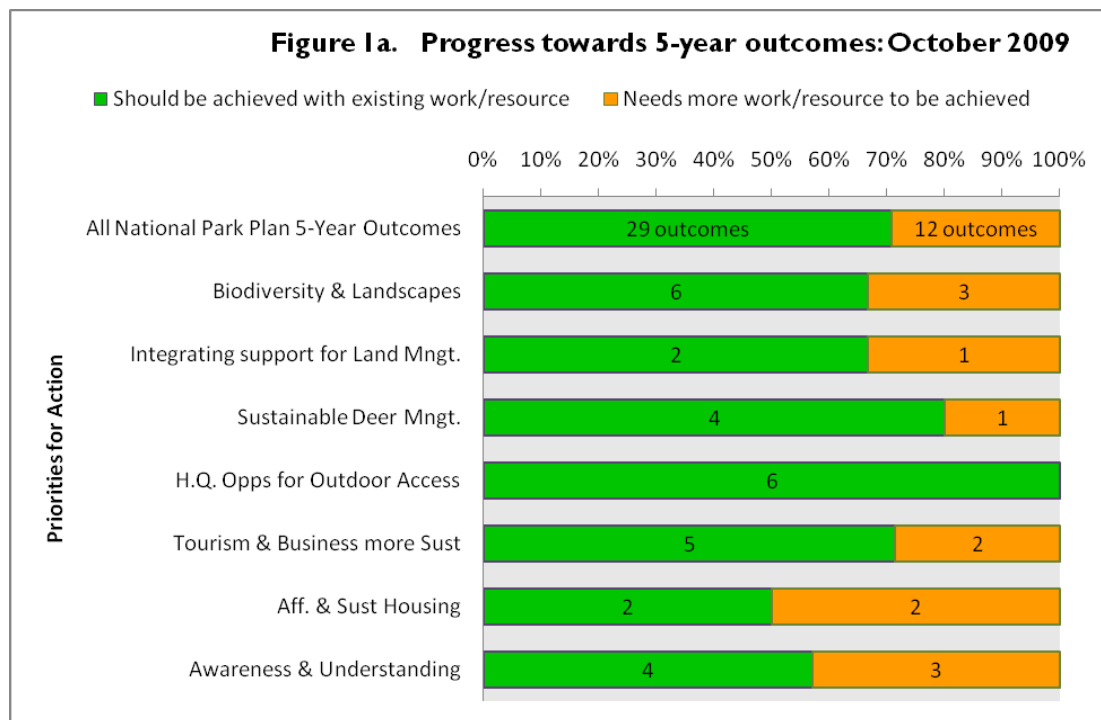
3. The purpose of the review is to take stock of delivery so far, look at the changed context for some Priorities for Action, and to ensure we and our partners maintain a clear focus for delivery through to 2012, before work to develop a new National Park Plan begins in 2010.
4. The health check was carried out with partners through the priority for action delivery teams, discussions between CNPA staff and with the endorsement of the National Park Strategy Group.
5. The review summarised here is focused on delivery of the outcomes of the plan. It does not reflect on or address some of the wider experience and lessons learned in relation to the approach to delivery or the partnership model. These more strategic issues will be addressed through the early stages of the process to develop the next National Park Plan, for which there is a Board discussion scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

### Changes in Context

6. There have been many changes in the National Park and the world around it since the National Park Plan was prepared prior to 2007. There has been a global economic slowdown, a future of contracting public spending is starting to take effect, visitor patterns and attitudes to Scotland and the National Park have changed, climate change has continued to become more of a practical and political priority. All these factors have influenced the delivery of the National Park Plan so far, and will influence it over the next two years.
7. The issue of climate change in particular has been a rising priority during the first years of delivery of this National Park Plan and is likely to continue be so beyond 2012. Climate change mitigation and adaptation is addressed through many of the Plan's priorities for action, but has increasingly provided a stronger focus for action in its own right.

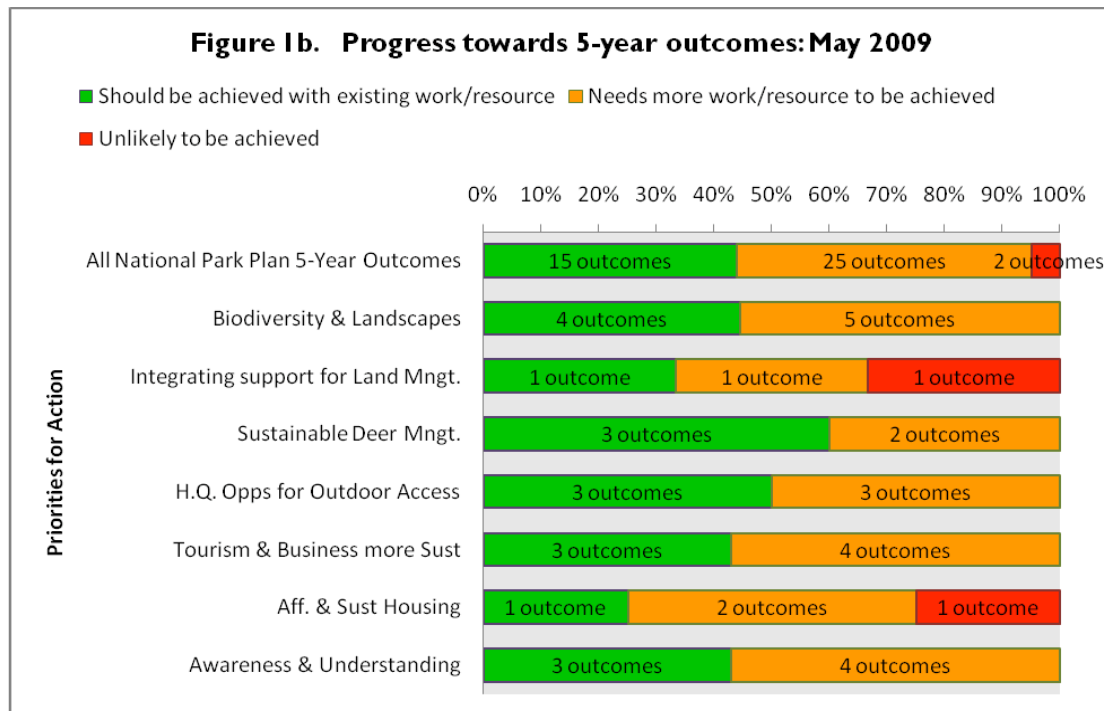
## Summary of Progress in Delivery of National Park Plan

8. The health check has been useful in refining our expectations of progress in National Park Plan delivery. Figure I below summarises the overall assessment of progress that is given in more detail in Annex I to this paper. It shows that 70% of the outcomes in the priorities for action are expected to be substantially achieved by 2012 with the work that is already planned and committed. Of the remaining 30% of actions, many are also likely to be achieved with work that is being planned.



9. There are no outcomes where there has been no progress towards the outcomes, nor where the outcome cannot be achieved. None of the outcomes are yet entirely achieved either. Many are now being achieved by work that should lay the basis for securing progress beyond 2012, when the immediate priorities of the next National Park Plan may be different. One example is the priority for action on Sustainable Deer Management. The work under the priority still requires effort and commitment from those involved, but structures and mechanisms that have already been put in place will deliver most of the outcomes and should continue to manage the issues behind them beyond 2012.
10. The outcomes are 5-year ones and the assessments are based on what can be achieved by 2012. While most assessments indicate that outcomes are likely to be substantially achieved by 2012, this are not intended to imply that the underlying issues will not remain important beyond 2012, or that work to tackle them should stop.
11. The overall assessment is more positive in this report than in the last report of May 2009. Figure Ib is shown below for comparison. The differences are partly due to further progress being made, and to a more consistent assessment across the priorities for action. The assumption in the assessments is that where work is

planned and expected to proceed, the outcome is classed as being on-track to be achieved. In particular, discussions with partners on the land management support and housing outcomes has led to a realistic focus on what can be achieved within the existing context over the next two years.



## Results of Health-check

12. The results of the health check are provided in more detail in Annex I to this Paper. The following section provides an overview of the issues raised and some of the implications generally and by each priority for action. Although this paper provides a critique of progress, it is worth reflecting that the overall picture is one of successful delivery and real progress since the National Park Plan was approved in 2007.
13. In July 2009 the **National Park Strategy Group** met at Boat of Garten and considered progress so far as well as challenges and opportunities that would face all those delivering the National Park Plan to 2012 and beyond. The Strategy Group raised the following priorities towards 2012:
  - a) **Climate change** - opportunities to use the Park to demonstrate mitigation and adaptation good practice at a regional scale, particularly in rural land use and tourism sectors, and to realise the renewable energy potential of the Park;
  - b) **Land management support** - effective and targeted land management support is a key mechanism to deliver a wide range of other NPP outcomes, so effort to improve the integration and targeting should continue. Support should seek to make SRDP work effectively in contributing to the NPP priorities, but also look beyond SRDP at other support options. The capacity of land management advisory services needs to be built to deliver improved support;

- c) **Biodiversity** - Bringing features on designated sites into favourable condition must remain a high priority to the 2010 target and beyond. The enhancement of habitat condition outside designated sites, as part of an integrated network of habitats, should remain a priority in the Park. There is an opportunity to identify innovative ways to help deliver those targets in the Park.
  - d) **Branding and Marketing** - The National Park brand needs to be developed as a commercial marketing opportunity, both for local businesses and national businesses that operate in the area. The Park needs to be marketed in a way that respects the distinctiveness of its individual component parts and contributes to a sense of caring for the place;
  - e) **Housing** - Given that financial and market constraints are beyond partners' control, the distinct focus for housing in the Park should be on improving quality and sustainability of housing;
  - f) **Education and skills** - There is a real opportunity to build on the Curriculum for Excellence to develop outdoor learning and rural training and skills opportunities.
  - g) **Enjoyment** - There are increasing opportunities for people to enjoy the Park without damaging it, particularly on the lower ground and closer to communities.
  - h) **Knowledge sharing** - We must try and make more of our collective data, information and knowledge of the Cairngorms through synthesis and sharing.
14. Annex I details the results of the health-check for each outcome and identifies the key deliverables we expect by 2012. A brief commentary on each priority, and the theme of climate change, is set out below.

### **Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Landscapes**

15. This Priority for Action has nine 5-year outcomes. Six outcomes are considered likely to be substantially achieved by 2012, with action underway that has already led to, or is expected to deliver substantial change.
16. Three outcomes under this priority are considered to require more work in order to achieve them. One of these outcomes is linked to the role of the planning system through the Local Plan and supplementary planning guidance. The Local Plan has taken longer to develop than was expected when the Park Plan was prepared, and will therefore not have the effects on development that it is intended to as early as was anticipated. The main milestone is now getting the plan and associated guidance in place.
17. A second outcome relates to increasing habitat network connectivity. Progress has been slower than anticipated, especially with regard to forest habitat networks, but changes in support payments and targeting work with FCS give an opportunity to progress this further in the next two years. Work on wetland habitats is also progressing through a wetland project now established.
18. Finally, an outcome that seeks a programme to safeguard and manage important historic landscapes and archaeological sites will not be achieved in the sense that was originally conceived. There are no significant additional funds or powers available to

partners or the CNPA to safeguard and manage such sites. The focus of work has moved to support the Community Heritage Project, through which support will be given to communities in relation to their local heritage interests.

***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

19. The outcomes for this Priority for Action should be substantially achieved by 2012 with the work that is programmed. The biggest challenge is likely to be in developing further projects to improve habitat connectivity within the Park. The 2010 International Year of Biodiversity will provide a particular impetus to both engagement and biodiversity targets.

***Implications for CNPA Priorities***

20. CNPA will continue its co-ordination and a wide programme of actions in which we are already engaged or committed, particularly through the Local Biodiversity Action group and CNPA's planning function.

**Integrating Public Support for Land Management**

21. This Priority for Action has three 5-year outcomes. Two of the outcomes, linked to a diverse, productive and viable land management sector, and to the nature of public benefits that land managers are asked to deliver, are considered to be on track to be achieved by 2012. However, one outcome, linked to the integration of land management support within the Park is considered to require more work in order to be achieved by 2012.
22. The main challenge is to maximize the opportunities of the Rural Priorities support system to target priorities in the National Park and to provide proactive guidance to land managers on the opportunities and how to realise them.

***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

23. The SRDP is the most powerful tool for delivering the outcomes under this priority for action and improving the way that it works within the National Park will increase progress to delivering these outcomes.

***Implications for CNPA Priorities***

24. Developing effective systems of land management support and targeting in the National Park remains a priority for CNPA in the short-term, and is a key issue to be addressed further in work to develop the next National Park Plan.

**Supporting Sustainable Deer Management**

25. This Priority for Action has five 5-year outcomes. Four of the outcomes are considered likely to be substantially achieved by 2012. The Cairngorms Deer Management Group (CDAG) has supported an inclusive deer management planning process across the Park and has improved communication between deer managers, agencies, the public and NGOs. CDAG has agreed to develop a Deer Framework that will enable effective cooperation between different Deer Management Groups in the Park and take forward the national wild deer strategy within the Park and work on this is underway. Joint Agency working of DCS, FCS and SNH has supported

management on designated sites and contributed to those sites coming into 'favourable' condition.

26. One outcome, helping a wider range of people enjoy stalking, is considered to need more work for significant progress to be made by 2012. However, work towards achieving it is being taken forward by the Country Sports Tourism Group in a Scotland-wide initiative and further action is not considered a priority.

#### ***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

27. The continued operation of CDAG and development of the National Park Deer Framework should lead to the achievement of most outcomes and provide a basis on which deer managers and wider interests can sustain the progress made.

#### ***Implications for CNPA Priorities***

28. The CNPA should continue to support CDAG and the deer framework as the key mechanism to deliver these outcomes and embed them into practice. Once the framework is in place, we should be able to adjust some of the staff time focused on deer to wider upland management issues.

#### **Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access**

29. This Priority for Action has six 5-year outcomes, all of which are considered likely to have been substantially achieved by 2012. The priority for action is closely linked to the development and management of the core paths plan for the National Park and implementation of associated access legislation.

#### ***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

30. Work to identify, formalise and manage core paths in the National Park should continue beside other support for countryside access.

#### ***Implications for CNPA priorities***

31. The CNPA should continue to implement the core paths plan and uphold access rights. We are now into the phase of delivering the high quality experience expected on core paths.

#### **Making Tourism and Business more Sustainable**

32. This Priority for Action has seven 5-year outcomes. Five of the outcomes are considered likely to be achieved by 2012, with the National Park's special qualities providing an increasing basis for economic activity, and business use of the CNPA brand improving commercial advantage and quality standards. Visitors are expected to have high quality experiences in the Park, and more are expected to contribute either directly or indirectly to the conservation and enhancement of the Park. Many communities in the Park will have completed community action plans and will have been able to influence the way their communities' develop.
33. The distribution of visitors throughout the year is not expected to become more even without additional work and implementation of a marketing framework for the Park. Improved marketing is also considered necessary to increase the use of local suppliers and produce. The development of a marketing framework is a priority for

the Cairngorms Business Partnership in 2010/2011, but it is unlikely that it will have had significant effects on consumers/customers or businesses until 2012 and beyond.

***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

34. Many of the outcomes under this priority for action are likely to remain important beyond 2012. The assessments of progress are based on expectations of change between 2007 and 2012, and what can reasonably be achieved in five years. Much of the work under this priority for action has been focused on developing the best structures to lead and manage change. The Cairngorms Business Partnership has been developed to provide an effective voice and management tool for business in the Park, and is expected to lead work on marketing the Park and businesses up to 2012 and beyond, embedding this progress within the business sector.

***Implications for CNPA Priorities***

35. The CNPA will support the Cairngorms Business Partnership as a key delivery mechanism and in doing so, adjust our own priorities and resources to reflect the respective roles of the CBP and CNPA. We expect that our input into some areas of work, for example marketing, will reduce, allowing CNPA to focus on other areas that complement the work of the Business Partnership.

**Making Housing More Affordable and Sustainable**

36. This Priority for Action has four 5-year outcomes. Two outcomes, to improve the sustainability of new housing, and to increase the availability of private rented affordable housing are considered likely to be achieved by 2012. However, two outcomes that are linked to the overall availability of affordable housing, compared to need for it, are considered to need more work if they are to be achieved by 2012. This is in spite of significant new supplies of affordable housing (105 units for social rent and 42 units for low cost sale between 2006 and 2009) having been created in Badenoch and Strathspey. There is limited impact that can be made on these outcomes in this timescale given the wider economic conditions.

***Implications for National Park Plan Delivery***

37. Funding for affordable housing is guided by local authorities and based on both the relative housing needs in different areas, and to some extent on a rotation of resources between different areas. Although some additional affordable housing is expected to be created within the Park before 2012, neither it nor the affordable housing created between 2007 and 2009 is likely to significantly reduce overall pressure for affordable housing in the Park. It is unlikely that any significant additional resources for affordable housing in the Park will be programmed by local authorities before 2012.

***Implications for CNPA Priorities***

38. The CNPA has little direct influence over the provision of affordable housing other than through the planning system's role in identifying sites for housing land, policies for affordable housing, and determining planning applications. However, without funding to develop, developers and housing associations cannot build substantial new numbers of affordable housing units. The CNPA's role in the planning system allows it to have a greater influence over the location, design and sustainability of new housing developments. CNPA should focus its priorities on implementing the Local



Plan and associated guidance, in particular the Sustainable Design Guide and developing the next Local Development Plan.

### **Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park**

39. This Priority for Action has seven 5-year outcomes. Four outcomes are considered likely to be achieved substantially by 2012. These outcomes are linked to the visitor experience in and of the Park, opportunities for people to learn about the Park, and the availability of more detailed information on the special qualities of the Park.
40. Three outcomes are considered to require more effort in order to be achieved substantially by 2012. Two of the outcomes are related to increasing awareness of the Park across Scotland and to more people having an understanding of its special management needs. In fact, work is planned to secure these outcomes but requires some additional effort from all partners for the outcomes to be achieved to the extent that was envisaged the National Park Plan was prepared. A third outcome is linked to the opportunities for people be involved in practical caring for the Park and its special qualities. Although there continue to be opportunities for people to do so at a variety of sites and through a variety of organisations, none of these have identified significant unmet demand for more opportunities.

### **Implications for National Park Plan Delivery**

41. The work that is currently planned on: developing a National Park marketing strategy; establishing the National Park web portal; extending the use and awareness of the National Park Brand; presenting visitor attractions and sites in the context of the Park; and developing the Park's potential as a learning resource are all important to achieving this Priority for Action's outcomes.

### **Implications for CNPA Priorities**

42. The CNPA needs to continue to support partners in raising the profile of the National Park and presenting their resources in the context of the Park – this remains a challenge given the variety of different brand aspirations that exist among partners in the Park. CNPA's unique role remains in the overview of awareness of the Park as a whole and ensuring others connect into this.

### **Delivering in Response to Climate Change**

43. The mid-term review and the meeting of the Strategy Group on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009 identified climate change policy as a significant change in context and drivers affecting National Park Plan delivery. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act and associated delivery plan has raised the importance of meeting obligations to reduce carbon emissions as well as support adaptation. Partners and Scottish Government have set out a clear view that delivery of the National Park Plan should adapt to this new policy driver and that the National Park should be a place where best practice in climate change mitigation and adaptation can be demonstrated.
44. There are many actions contained within the seven priorities in the National Park Plan that contribute to delivering national climate change targets. However, more co-ordination and an increased scale of action is required. Arising from the mid-term review is therefore a clear focus on a Low Carbon Cairngorms programme of work. This sets out a series of actions that will be taken within the remaining two

years of the current National Park Plan and will feed into development of the next plan, in which a wider programme of low carbon work will be embedded. The accompanying paper on Low Carbon Cairngorms sets out the priorities for the next two years.

45. Although many of the component actions of Low Carbon Cairngorms are already reported within the existing priorities of the National Park Plan, a new reporting theme will be added to the National Park Plan and Corporate Plan monitoring reports to track progress on the overall package of low carbon work.
46. Work on adaptation to climate change will also continue to develop through the priorities of the Plan. In the next two years this includes species and habitat work to enhance habitat networks, work to help land management businesses adapt to low carbon management practices and be ready for likely changes in future land management supports, and helping tourism and other businesses adapt to changes in visitor patterns resulting from more variable snow cover.

### **Summary of Implications for CNPA**

47. The commentary above identifies a number of implications for the way CNPA plans and spends its financial and staff resources over the remaining period to 2012. This analysis will guide our corporate and operational planning during this period. This is also a period of transition as we prepare to shift our focus of delivery to a new National Park Plan from 2012 onwards.
48. Key implications for CNPA from this review are:
  - a) Maintain operational co-ordination of delivery through the Delivery Teams;
  - b) Focus on adoption and implementation of the Local Plan and associated guidance and policies;
  - c) Engage partners in discussions on alternative land management support options for 2013 onwards;
  - d) Focus our housing work on implementing the Local Plan and Sustainable Design Guide, and facilitating opportunities for innovative or demonstration projects;
  - e) Support the establishment of the Cairngorms Business Partnership and manage a transition of delivery responsibilities to the Partnership, changing our own staff resource allocation to complement delivery through the CBP;
  - f) Focus on embedding the brand and promotion of awareness and understanding of the Park into the activities of partners;
  - g) Report on climate change work explicitly in National Park Plan and Corporate Plan reports.
49. In addition to these implications for CNPA's co-ordination and delivery, CNPA will begin to engage partners on the next National Park Plan in 2010, which will also be a priority in planning our deployment of staff time and resources.

## **Recommendation**

50. That the Board agrees the focus for the priorities for action for the remaining two and a half years of this National Park Plan delivery as detailed in Annex I.

## **Arrangements for New Forums**

51. In May the Board agreed changes to the advisory forums that have been in place since approval of the National Park Plan. Responding to feedback from participants and our own observations, the Board agreed to move away from the three general forums focused on the three themes of conserving and enhancing, living and working, understanding and enjoying. In their place, it was agreed to establish a land management forum and sustainable tourism forum, on the basis of a clearly identifiable need and desire for such forums. It was also agreed that any other forums could be established where there is a clear desire from potential participants and a clear purpose in the context of the National Park.
52. Following discussions with a number of partners on how these forums should be organised in order to operate effectively and add value for those participating, the Board are now invited to consider and agree the arrangements for the two new forums. Given the role of these forums and their purpose, it is envisaged that CNPA will provide the secretariat function to support the two groups.

## **Land Management Forum**

53. Feedback from land management interests involved in the conserving and enhancing forum, together with suggestions for drawing together groups of land managers, policy makers and researchers on specific current topics indicates there is a desire for some form of land management forum. It also offers an effective way for CNPA to engage with this wide sector of interests that are key in shaping the National Park.

### ***Purpose***

54. To provide a forum to come together to discuss issues affecting land management in the Park, share experience and ideas and advise each other and CNPA. An emphasis on connecting practice, policy and research in order to inform and share good practice on the ground and influence effective policy development.

### ***Participants***

55. land managers, public agencies, NGOs, Scottish Government

### ***Format***

56. Programme of themed days arranged around site visits on relevant topics.

### ***How should the forum be constituted?***

57. The membership of this forum should remain flexible so as to be able to focus meetings on particular topics and ensure appropriate interests are invited on each occasion. We anticipate a steady core of members, which others would join depending on the topic.

58. Invitations to participate in the forum will be circulated to:
- a) Estate owners/managers
  - b) Representative Bodies including SRPBA/SEBG/NFUS/SCF/ConFor/Fisheries Boards
  - c) Environment Link
  - d) Agencies including SNH, SEPA, FCS, DCS and Enterprise Companies
  - e) Research Institutions including MLURI and UHI
59. Experience of running similar forums suggests that the best option is for the election of a chair for the forum from amongst its members.

### **Sustainable Tourism Forum**

60. One of the principle reasons for convening the Forum is to meet the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In order to achieve the status of Charter member, protected areas need to fulfil a number of requirements, which include :
- a) The establishment of a permanent forum or equivalent arrangement for partnership between the park authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism business,
  - b) The elaboration, in this forum, of sustainable tourism strategy for the protected area. This should address key issues specified by the Charter and include an action plan for meeting the identified strategic objectives.

### **Purpose**

61. To provide a forum to bring together those with an interest in and responsibility for implementing the principles of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in the Park, to
- a) Advise on the development of the strategy for sustainable tourism
  - b) Advise each other and CNPA on issues relating to sustainable tourism
  - c) Provide a mechanism for cross-sector discussion and consultation on sustainable tourism issues

### **Participants**

62. On the basis of experience with other Advisory Forums it is suggested that the Sustainable Tourism Forum is kept 20 to people or less with suggested representation from following stakeholder groups who should be identified by each of the respective lead bodies.

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Number of places</b>	<b>Lead body for identification of participants</b>
Tourism Businesses	5	Cairngorms Business Partnership
Local community organisations	5	Association of Cairngorms Communities
Conservation Organisations	2	Scottish Environment Link
Public agencies	3	CNPA, SNH and VisitScotland
Local authorities	2	Agreement between each LA
Land managers	2	SRBBA. NFUS
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	

**Format**

63. Regular meetings at least 3 times per year or as required

**How should the forum be constituted?**

64. Given the requirement of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism to have a forum of this type and the role we would expect the forum to play in advising on implementation of the charter principles, a more formal structure of the group is considered necessary. Membership should be based on appropriate representation across the sectors with an interest and role in sustainable tourism as proposed above.
65. Experience of running similar forums suggests that the best option is for the election of a chair for the forum from amongst its members

**Other Forums or groups**

66. The board agreed in May that CNPA should support other forums or groups that wish to come together to address issues of relevance to the National Park where there is clear added value in doing so. To date, one other group has emerged from suggestions for a farmers discussion group. Known as the Farmers' Forum, CNPA is helping this group become established and providing a secretariat function for the time being. The group is for farmers and crofters in the Park to come together to address issues of practical interest to members.
67. The first meeting was held on 7<sup>th</sup> October, focused on animal health issues and attracted over 60 participants. There appears to be a good demand for future meetings and suggestions for topics from amongst the participants. There is a distinction between this group led by farming and crofting interests and the desire that remains for a land management forum with a broader focus on strategic land use issues.

**Recommendation**

68. **That the Board agrees the purpose and constitution of the Land Management Forum and Sustainable Tourism Forum.**

**Gavin Miles**  
**October 2009**

**[gavinmiles@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:gavinmiles@cairngorms.co.uk)**