



A Draft Plan for the Future
Strategic Environmental Assessment
Environmental Report



HOW TO COMMENT

THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK - DRAFT PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

This Environmental Report is published for public consultation alongside the Draft National Park Plan (comprising two documents – 'Looking to 2030' and 'Priorities for Action 2007-2012'). The consultation period for both runs to 30th June 2006.

Comments are requested at any time before 30th June 2006 and should be sent to:

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Further copies of the Environmental Report and its Non-Technical Summary, can be obtained from the same address. Copies of the Draft National Park Plan and the accompanying State of the Park Report are also available.

Copies of all these documents are available to view at the National Park Authority offices in Grantown-on-Spey (14, The Square) and Ballater (Station Square); or at local libraries within the National Park.

The documents can also be downloaded from the Cairngorms National Park Authority website: www.cairngorms.co.uk

For a large print version of this publication, please contact the Cairngorms National Park Authority on tel: 01479 873535

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I. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

I.1 This is a non-technical summary of the Environmental Report, part of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Draft National Park Plan (The Cairngorms National Park – A Draft Plan for the Future).

It explains:

- what the SEA is;
- why it has been done;
- what effects the draft Park Plan is likely to have on the environment.

This non-technical summary can be read on its own or as part of the full SEA Environmental Report.

I.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA for short, is a way of making sure that environmental implications are carefully considered when a plan is developed. It is a formal part of the plan process that is a legal obligation. It is required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004. These implement a European Directive that requires SEA to be carried out on certain kinds of plans and programmes.

I.3 The idea behind SEA is that, by making sure that environmental features such as plants and animals, air quality, human health or historic remains are considered as the plan is made, then it is less likely that the plan will harm them. SEA helps to make sure that environmental considerations are taken into account by the plan in two main ways.

I.4 Firstly, the SEA predicts what effects the plan is likely to have on the environment and whether they are considered significant. Secondly, if the SEA does predict 'significant' effects, the plan should be changed to introduce measures that will make the effects less harmful or serious. Equally, the SEA should highlight opportunities to strengthen the positive environmental effects

of the plan. The end result should be a plan that is unlikely to lead to significant harm to the environment, and should maximise the positive benefits to the environment.

I.5 The SEA process is also about making public the information used to predict the effects of the plan on the environment, and how they were predicted. The public have an opportunity to comment on the SEA process at this stage, through publication of the 'Environmental Report', which accompanies publication of the Draft National Park Plan. This is the current stage of the process.

Summary of the SEA process

I.6 The SEA process can be broken down to a set of stages that happen as the Park Plan is being prepared.

- i. Describe the current condition of the environment in the area and how it is changing or has changed. Predict what the environment would be like in the future without the plan being made;
- ii. Consider how different approaches to the plan could have different environmental effects;
- iii. Predict what effects the draft Park Plan would have on the environment;
- iv. Decide on ways of reducing any harmful effects and increasing any positive effects of the Park Plan on the environment and change the Draft Park Plan accordingly;
- v. Publish the Draft Park Plan and an SEA Environmental Report that explains what the SEA is and how it has been done so that people can comment on them (this is the stage the Park Plan and SEA are at just now);

- vi. Take note of the comments on the Environmental Report and make any changes to the Park Plan or SEA that result from them;
- vii. Continue to revise the Park Plan and do any extra assessment that is required as a result of the SEA or comments on the Environmental Report;
- viii. Submit the finalised Park Plan and an updated Environmental Report to Ministers;
- ix. Publish the Park Plan and write a formal statement of how the SEA has been carried out with the Park Plan and how it has affected the Park Plan;
- x. Keep measuring what effects the Park Plan actually has on the environment as it is implemented, so that changes can be made in future if they are needed, and so that it is possible to predict effects more accurately in the future.

Summary of the likely significant effects of the Draft Park Plan

- 1.7 The objectives of the Draft Park Plan have been assessed, to identify the likely significant effects on the environment. Overall, the objectives are considered to have a positive effect on the environment, and there are no likely negative effects identified.
- 1.8 This might be expected, given the aims of the Park which are the starting point for the plan.

The aims are:

- to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public;

- to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

- 1.9 The plan's objectives have therefore been developed to deliver these aims specifically seeking a positive effect on the environment. Aims for economic development, communities and recreation have also been developed so that they do not have a damaging effect on the environment. They should at least result in a neutral impact, if not positively benefiting the environment.
- 1.10 All the significant effects that have been predicted for each of the plan's objectives are explained in Section 9 and Annex 2 of the full Environmental Report. The uncertainties and difficulties of the assessment are also explained in the full Environmental Report.

The differences SEA has made to the Draft Park Plan

- 1.11 As a result of assessment, a number of the plan's objectives have been modified in order to strengthen their positive environmental effects. It has also identified some objectives which could be modified further to strengthen the positive environmental effects. These will be considered following the consultation on the Environmental Report. Any changes will be reported when the final Park Plan is published.

Next steps

- 1.12 After consultation on the Draft Park Plan together with the Environmental Report, any appropriate changes will be made and the final Park Plan will be prepared. Changes to the objectives or actions proposed in the plan will be assessed for their likely environmental effects. This assessment will be reported in an updated version of the Environmental Report that will accompany publication of the final Park Plan.

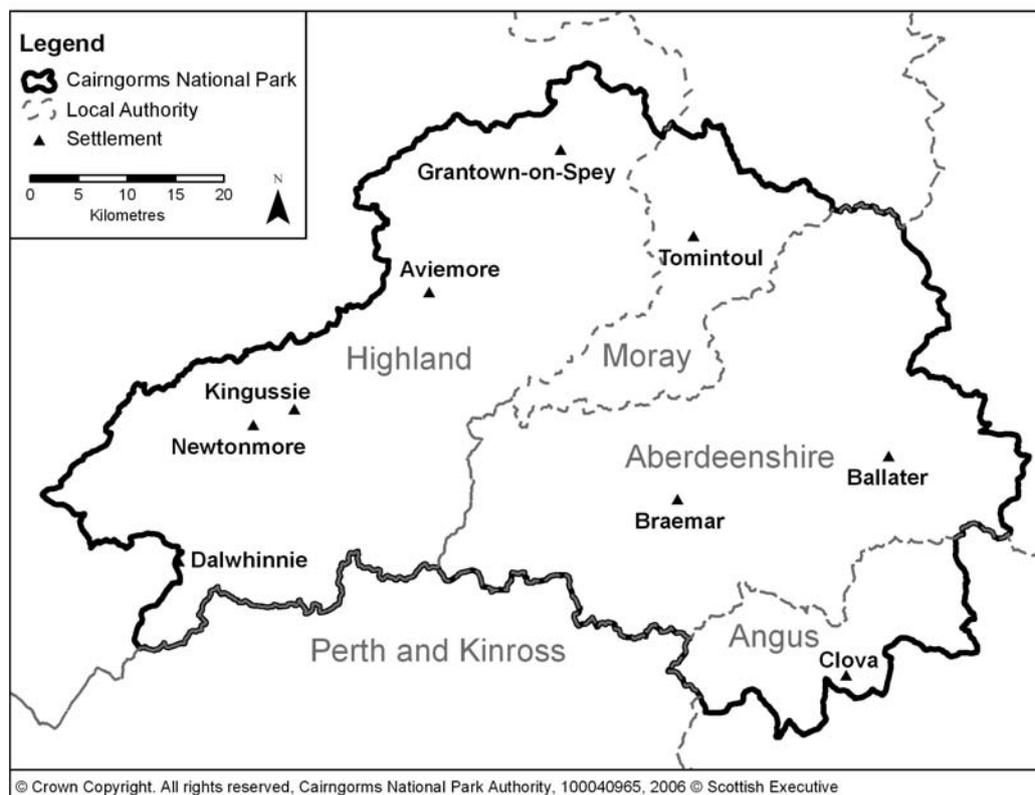
2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This is an Environmental Report in terms of the European Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 for the Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan (Park Plan).
- 2.2 The Cairngorms National Park Authority is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Park Plan, and this Environmental Report accompanies the consultative Draft Park Plan.
- 2.3 The Environmental Report describes the SEA process that has accompanied development of the Park Plan so far. It follows a determination by the National Park Authority (18th July 2005) that SEA of the Park Plan should be undertaken.
- 2.4 A scoping process to identify a methodology for assessment and the likely significant effects of the Park Plan was then undertaken. A scoping report was sent to the Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Historic Scotland) on the 22nd July 2005. Their comments, received on 26th August 2005, have informed the assessment methodology and process.

The Cairngorms National Park

- 2.5 Map 2.1 shows the boundaries of the Cairngorms National Park. It extends to 1,467 square miles and covers part of four local authority areas (Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus). The Park is centred on the Cairngorm mountains and extends to Granttown-on-Spey, Strathdon, Ballater, the heads of the Angus Glens, Dalwhinnie and Laggan.

Map 2.1 The Cairngorms National Park



This publication has been produced for public consultation. It assesses the likely environmental effects of the strategies contained in the Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan documents. The maps contained are for information only and should not be used for navigational purposes. Reproduction is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holders. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the Cairngorms National Park Authority is not responsible for any errors or omissions.

The National Park designation

2.6 The Cairngorms National Park was established in September 2003. It is the second National Park in Scotland following the earlier establishment of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. It was established under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, which also required a new National Park Authority to co-ordinate management of the Park.

2.7 The National Park was established on the basis of:

- the outstanding national importance of its natural and cultural heritage;
- the area's distinctive character and coherent identity;
- the special management needs of the area.

2.8 The aims of the National Park are:

- to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public;
- to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

The National Park Authority

2.9 The National Park Authority is a Non-Departmental Public Body. It has a board of 25 members, of which 20 are appointed by the Scottish Ministers, (10 on nomination by the four local authorities) and five are elected by residents of the National Park.

2.10 The general purpose of the National Park Authority as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 is to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved

in a co-ordinated way. The Park Authority is therefore an enabling organisation that must work with and through other bodies to bring added value to the management of the Park, and to achieve the four aims.

2.11 The National Park Authority must ensure that the four aims are achieved collectively. However, if there appears to be a conflict between the first aim and the other aims, greater weight must be given to the first aim (Section 9(6) of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000).

The Cairngorms National Park and the planning system

2.12 Unlike a local authority, the Park Authority is not a full Planning Authority. Instead it shares planning powers in the Park area with the four constituent local authorities. The Park Authority is responsible for preparing a Local Plan for the area, but only operates the development control function on applications that it considers to be of significance to the aims of the National Park.

2.13 Development control functions within the National Park are shared by the Park Authority and the four constituent local authorities. Planning applications are made to the local authorities in the first instance, and the National Park Authority has a power to 'call-in' applications to be decided by the Park Authority where it considers they are of significance to the aims of the National Park. In practice, this has meant that so far the Park Authority has called in around 16 per cent of the planning applications within the National Park area for determination.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND...cont

The Cairngorms National Park Plan

2.14 The Park Plan is the strategic management plan for the National Park. The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 requires the National Park Authority to prepare a Park Plan setting out its policy for:

- Managing the National Park, and
- Co-ordinating the exercise of:
 - i) the authority's functions in relation to the National Park, and;
 - ii) the functions of other public bodies and office holders so far as affecting the National Park.

2.15 The purpose of the Park Plan is to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way. The Park Plan covers all sectors relevant to the aims of the Park and provides the strategic context for the work of all public bodies in the Park. Once approved by Ministers, all public bodies must have regard to the Park Plan in the discharge of their relevant functions.

2.16 The Park Plan sets out the strategic direction for the Park in the long-term, looking at least 25 years ahead. It also identifies the priorities for action in the coming five year period. The Plan will be reviewed at five yearly intervals.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE SEA AND PARK PLAN CONTEXT

The purpose of the SEA

3.1 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) described in this Environmental Report is an “assessment of the effects of the plan on the environment” under the terms of European Directive 2001/42/EC.

3.2 Article 1 of the Directive states that its objective is:

“to provide for a high level protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant environmental effects on the environment.”

3.3 For some plans or programmes, the integration of environmental considerations may be a new idea. Given the aims and purpose of the National Park Plan, SEA should provide a transparent way to record the decision making process and support delivery of the Park's aims.

Structure of the National Park Plan

3.4 The Draft Park Plan comprises two parts:

- Looking to 2030 – This looks 25 years ahead and sets out the long-term vision and strategic objectives for the Park;
- Priorities for Action 2007-2012 – This looks to the next five years and identifies the immediate priorities where action needs to be taken.

3.5 The Draft Park Plan has been developed through discussion with a wide range of partners and interests, and is now subject to a formal public consultation. This consultation period is being used to inform the development of the final Park Plan. In particular, work programmes for each Priority for Action are being developed in parallel with the consultation, and will be informed by responses.

3.6 The contents of the consultative Draft Park Plan are shown in Figure 3.1 over the next two pages.

3.7 The SEA focuses on the long-term strategy, set out in Looking to 2030, which sets the framework for future action and gives a clear direction for the management of the Park through a set of objectives. It does not, at this stage, assess the proposed Priorities for Action identified in the plan.

3.8 These prioritise, within the broad range of objectives, those areas in which action should focus over the next five years. At this stage they therefore remain at a strategic level and reflect the objectives, so a separate assessment is unlikely to be useful. However, as these proposals are developed into agreed action programmes, further assessment may be required. This will either be carried out when updating the Environmental Report to accompany the final Park Plan, or when developing the more detailed plans and strategies that will result from these programmes. This is discussed further in Section 9.

Figure 3.1 Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan contents

Looking to 2030:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 National Parks in Scotland
 - National Park Designation
 - National Park Aims
 - Purpose of the Park Authority
 - International Context
- 1.2 The Park Plan
 - Purpose of the Park Plan
 - How the Draft Plan has been Developed
 - Structure of the Draft Park Plan
 - Relationship to Planning and Development Control
 - Relationship to other Plans
- 1.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment

2. The Cairngorms - A Special Place

- Why is the Cairngorms a National Park?
- The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms

3. Managing the Park in a Changing Environment

- A Brief History of the Cairngorms
- Responding to External Changes
- An Integrated Approach
- Managing Conflict
- Diversity within the Park
- Building on Experience
- Guiding Principles

4. Vision - the Park in 25 years time

5. Conserving, Enhancing and Managing the Park

- 5.1 Introduction - Conserving and Enhancing the Special Qualities
- 5.2 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Heritage
 - Landscape
 - Nature Conservation
- 5.3 Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
 - Soils
 - Water
 - Air
- 5.4 Integrated Land Management
 - Farming and Crofting
 - Forestry
 - Moorland Management
 - Deer Management
 - Fisheries Management
- 5.5 Conserving and Enhancing the Cultural Heritage
 - The Built and Historic Environment
 - Culture and Traditions

6. Communities Living and Working in the Park

- 6.1 Introduction - Encouraging Sustainable Development
- 6.2 Economy and Employment
- 6.3 Education and Training
- 6.4 Sustainable Tourism
- 6.5 Transport and Communications
- 6.6 Housing
- 6.7 Renewable Energy
- 6.8 Waste Management
- 6.9 Strengthening Communities

7. Understanding and Enjoying the Park

- 7.1 Introduction - Understanding and Enjoying the Special Qualities of the Park
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation
- 7.3 Visitor Services
- 7.4 Learning and Understanding

8. Implementation

- 8.1 A Partnership Approach
- 8.2 Priorities for Action 2007-2012

9. Monitoring and Review

- 9.1 Monitoring Delivery of the Plan
- 9.2 Monitoring the 'Health' of the Park
- 9.3 Proposed Health Indicators
- 9.4 Explanation of Proposed Indicator Themes
- 9.5 Review of the Park Plan
- 9.6 Interim Reporting and Review

Priorities for Action 2007-2012:

1. Introduction

2. Vision - the Park in 25 Years Time

3. Guiding Principles

4. Priorities for 2007-2012

- 4.1 Identifying the Priorities
- 4.2 Proposed Action Programmes - what should be achieved by 2012?
 - Conserving and Enhancing the Park's Biodiversity and Landscapes
 - Developing Sustainable Deer Management
 - Supporting Integrated Land Management
 - Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access
 - Making Housing Affordable and Sustainable
 - Making Tourism and Businesses Sustainable
 - Developing Awareness and Understanding of the Park
- 4.3 Timetable for Developing Action Programmes
- 4.4 What about other work required?
- 4.5 Implementing the Plan and its Priorities - A Partnership Approach

5. Monitoring and Review

- 5.1 Monitoring the Priorities for Action
- 5.2 Monitoring the 'Health' of the Park
- 5.3 Review of the Priorities for Action

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE SEA AND PARK PLAN CONTEXT...cont

Links to other plans and programmes

3.9 The Park Plan provides the context and strategic direction for all other plans, policies and strategies that are relevant to the aims of the Park. In particular, these include:

- The Cairngorms Local Plan;
- Core Paths Plans;
- Forestry and Woodland Framework;
- Sustainable Tourism Strategy;
- Strategic Deer Plan;
- Housing Strategy;
- Outdoor Access Strategy.

Wider context of the Park Plan

3.10 At the same time, the Park Plan sits within the context of wider regional, national and international policy. It must recognise the statutory obligations and responsibilities that flow from legislation as well as taking account of the policy direction and targets set out by other plans, policies and strategies.

3.11 The type of policies and plans that influence the Park Plan are summarised below. The relevant legislation and policies are listed in greater detail in Annex 1 of the Environmental Report. The Annex also identifies the main environmental objectives or targets of these plans that are relevant to the Park Plan, and the sections of the Park Plan to which they are pertinent.

International policy

3.12 There is a range of international legislation and policy which sets out environmental obligations and a context for the Park Plan. This includes European Directives such as the EU Air Quality, Water Framework, Birds and Habitats Directives.

National legislation and policy

3.13 Relevant national legislation includes the Wildlife and Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. In some cases, national legislation interprets the implementation of European Directives. Other national policy such as the UK and Scottish Biodiversity Strategies, Waste Strategy or River Basin Management Planning also guides the environmental objectives of the Park Plan.

3.14 The Scottish Executive's Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) set out national planning policy and guidance on how it is interpreted. The National Planning Framework sets out the Scotland-wide planning context.

Regional policy

3.15 More localised plans and policies also set a context for the Park Plan, such as catchment management plans, local authority waste plans or local biodiversity action plans. These help to inform development of the Park Plan, but may also have a role to play in implementing the Park Plan, working towards some of its objectives.

4.METHODOLOGY

The Cairngorms National Park Authority's approach to SEA

- 4.1 The Park Authority's approach to carrying out the SEA is based on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Scottish Executive guidance and the desire to integrate the SEA process closely with the development of the Plan itself. The aims and objectives of the Park include explicit reference to a wide range of environmental topics. The procedure which is formalised through SEA is therefore central to the process of developing the Park Plan.
- 4.2 The Park Authority chose to carry out SEA of the National Park Plan internally rather than employ consultants to carry out the work as a contract. It was felt that by doing the SEA 'in-house', it could be better integrated with the plan-making process and would lead to an improved plan. It was also felt that the Park Authority contained much of the necessary expertise and knowledge of the National Park and could use the SEA process to develop skills that would be employed in SEA of other plans and programmes produced by the National Park Authority.

The SEA process

- 4.3. The SEA process reflects the development of the Park Plan itself and can be divided into a number of different, but overlapping stages:

- i. Screening whether plan is likely to have significant environmental effects;
- ii. Collating and forecasting baseline information;
- iii. Scoping the likely significant environmental effects;
- iv. Developing environmental objectives and criteria;
- v. Assessing the Plan and alternatives;
- vi. Publishing the Environmental Report with the Draft Park Plan;
- vii. Modifying and finalising the Park Plan and revising the Environmental Report;
- viii. Finalising monitoring proposals;
- ix. Post-Adoption Statement of: how environmental considerations have been integrated in the plan; and how the environmental report, consultation responses and public opinions have been taken into account;
- x. Monitoring significant environmental effects of plan to inform review.

Each of these stages is now considered in more detail.

SEA Screening

- 4.4 An initial screening consultation was issued to the Consultation Authorities on 21 March 2005. All consultees agreed with the National Park Authority's view that the Park Plan could have significant environmental effects. The National Park Authority determined that the Park Plan should be subject to SEA on the 18th July 2005.

4.METHODOLOGY...cont

Environmental baseline

4.5 The collation of information to form the environmental baseline for the SEA was aided by the production of The State of the Park Report, part of the process of preparing the National Park Plan. The report draws together existing information on the Park's resources and special qualities as a baseline to inform development and assessment of the National Park Plan. It will also inform future plans and policies in the Cairngorms National Park.

The State of the Park Report comprises four sections:

- natural resources;
- cultural resources;
- visitor and recreation resources;
- economic and social resources.

In each section the report identifies as far as possible:

- current extent of the resource;
- relative importance of the resource;
- current state of the resource;
- key trends affecting the resource;
- limitations of existing data and information gaps.

4.6 The report provided much of the environmental baseline data against which the potential effects of the Park Plan can be assessed, and against which implementation of the Park Plan can be monitored. The State of the Park Report is published alongside the Draft Park Plan.

SEA scoping

4.7 Following the determination to carry out SEA, the National Park Authority sent a Scoping Report to the Consultation Authorities on 22nd July 2005.

It set out what the potential effects of the Park Plan could be, and proposed a methodology for assessment, including the SEA objectives that would be used for assessment. The Consultation Authorities provided the National Park Authority with their responses on 26th August 2005.

Developing environmental objectives and criteria

4.8 The SEA scoping report set out an environmental baseline together with SEA objectives and criteria for assessment of the Park Plan. These were modified following receipt of the Consultation Authorities' comments on the Scoping Report and are described in Section 6 of this Environmental Report. The objectives and criteria were further refined during the assessment.

Assessing the Park Plan

4.9 Each strategic objective of the Park Plan is subject to assessment against the SEA objectives, in order to predict likely environmental effects. The nature of these potential effects is recorded on detailed assessment sheets similar to that shown in Figure 4.1 opposite.

4.10 The assessment of each strategic objective was made by the judgement of the team responsible for preparing the Park Plan, together with a judgement from specialist staff in the Natural Heritage group of the Park Authority. This ensures that the SEA remains an integral part of the plan making process, but also involves the judgement of specialist staff not directly involved in the plan team. More detailed commentary on judging the significance of effects is given in Section 8 of this report, recording the assessment.

Figure 4.1 Example of SEA assessment sheet

Figure 4.1 Example of SEA assessment sheet		
Draft Park Plan Objective:	The draft plan objective and reference.	
Purpose of objective:	What the plan objective is supposed to achieve and why.	
Identify objective options including consideration of alternatives where relevant:	Detail of what policy options were considered in developing the plan objectives, what alternatives (if any were possible) were considered and decisions taken so far.	
Prediction of direct and indirect effects of objective: Detailed assessment of the plan objective against each SEA objective and reasoning behind predictions.		
SEA Objectives	Score	Reasoning for score
1		
2		
etc		
Summary of objective's effects:		A brief summary of the effects of the plan objective based on the detailed assessment.
Options for mitigation or modification:		Amendments to strengthen the positive effects or mitigate the negative effects of the plan objective.

4.11 A matrix of scores is used to summarise the effects. It can also be used to help identify trends in the effects of objectives, and help identify cumulative effects. An example of the assessment matrix is shown in Figure 4.2 below.

4.12 In order to make the scoring simple to understand and analyse, a system of five categories of effect is used for the assessment. These run from strongly positive effects through to strongly negative effects and are shown in Figure 4.3 (overleaf) with symbol codes.

Figure 4.2 Example of SEA assessment summary

Park Plan objectives	Cairngorms National Park SEA objectives			
	1	2	3	SEA objectives, 4, 5 etc
Objective 1a				
Objective 1b				
Objective 2a				
Objective 2b				
Objective 2c				
etc				

Figure 4.3 Environmental effect scoring

Symbol:	Description of effect:
++	strongly positive effect
+	positive effect
=	neutral or no effect
-	negative effect
--	strongly negative effect
?	uncertain effect/effect cannot be predicted
/	not applicable

The Environmental Report

4.13 This Environmental Report provides a summary of the SEA process to accompany the Consultative Draft Park Plan, and provides the information required of an Environmental Report as set out in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations.

Modifying the Park Plan and revising the Environmental Report

4.14 Both the Draft Park Plan and the Environmental Report are subject to consultation. The Park Plan is expected to develop as work on the priorities for action continues and responses from the consultation are received. An SEA consultation report will be prepared by the National Park Authority to collate comments on the SEA. A Park Plan consultation report will also collate comments on the Draft Park Plan. Both reports will be published by the National Park Authority to accompany the final Park Plan.

4.15 The likely environmental effects highlighted by the SEA, and any comments on this Environmental Report, will also inform any revision of the objectives in preparing the final Park Plan and maximising the positive effects on the environment. The final Park Plan will be accompanied by an updated Environmental Report that takes into account comments on this Report and any changes to the Park Plan.

Finalising monitoring proposals

4.16 Proposals for monitoring the significant environmental effects will be finalised, informed by the responses to the Draft Park Plan and the Environmental Report.

Statement of compliance and environmental considerations

4.17 A formal stage of the SEA process required by the Directive is a statement of how environmental considerations have been integrated in the plan; how the environmental report, consultation responses and public opinions have been taken into account; and the reasons for developing the plan as finalised, in light of other reasonable options considered. This statement will be prepared at the time of submission of the Park Plan to Ministers.

Monitoring significant environmental effects of the plan to inform review

4.18 This stage of the SEA process will be carried out as part of the ongoing monitoring and review of the Park Plan. It is anticipated that monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the Plan will be supplemented by more strategic monitoring of the state of the Park against health indicators (many linked to the state of the environment) that are being developed through the consultation process.

Consultation in the SEA process

- 4.19 This Environmental Report is subject to consultation with the Draft Park Plan. It is hoped that the Consultation Authorities and public will provide comments on the likely significant environmental effects of the Park Plan as well as on the Plan itself.
- 4.20 The SEA process has involved two formal stages of consultation so far. The Consultation Authorities have been asked firstly for screening opinions and secondly for scoping opinions.

Difficulties encountered in the SEA process so far

- 4.21 SEA is intended to improve the plan-making process and to provide the public, as well as the plan-makers, with clear information about likely environmental effects of the plan. During the process so far, a number of factors have created difficulties or uncertainties that have affected both the consultative Draft Park Plan and the SEA.

Information gathering and availability

- 4.22 Both the Park Plan and SEA require information that is as accurate and up to date as possible. The State of the Park Report has gathered together a wide range of current information on the environmental resources of the Park, but it also identifies limitations to this information.
- 4.23 The new geography of the Park boundary means that many data sets cannot be interrogated or analysed at the Park level, because they have been collated for different boundaries. For example, a significant amount of data is collated at local authority level, which therefore requires extraction from four different sources, which do not match the Park boundary. This can be compounded by the fact that data is often held in different formats. This is an issue that will be addressed over time as the Park Authority identifies research priorities and carries out monitoring that will give an increasing knowledge base.

Difficulties in the assessment of plan objectives

- 4.24 In identifying relevant SEA objectives and criteria, it was difficult to identify the appropriate aspects of human health and population to consider in assessment. Schedule 2 of the Regulations identifies both of these topics as suitable for inclusion. However, it has proved difficult to separate the environmental effects on these two topics from the socio-economic effects that might be considered in a broader and separate sustainability appraisal.
- 4.25 The Park Plan SEA has combined these topics into one SEA objective (11) 'to maintain a sustainable and healthy population'. The criteria used for assessment relate to effects on human health and wellbeing, which are considered to include access to key services. The criteria used are:
- Provide for housing and service needs of local communities;
 - Ensure access to services for communities;
 - Encourage healthy lifestyles.
- 4.26 A second difficulty encountered was the limited ability to predict likely practical effects of objectives that are pitched at a high strategic level. By its nature, the Park Plan takes an overview and sets a strategic direction. The effects of many objectives will therefore depend on when, where and how they are implemented through specific action plans. However, despite this problem, as described further in Section 8, it has proved possible to assess whether the direction set by the plan's strategic objectives will support or work against the SEA objectives.
- 4.27 This means that SEA will need to be carried out on more detailed implementation plans as and when they are prepared. This will therefore form part of a hierarchy of assessment

5. ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE AND ISSUES

Environmental baseline of the Cairngorms National Park

5.1 The current environmental conditions form the baseline for considering potential impacts. In the absence of change, the current trends are considered likely to continue. This section of the Environmental Report describes the current environmental baseline and trends that are considered relevant to the National Park and Park Plan.

5.2 Figure 5.1 summarises the key environmental baseline facts. Maps 5.1 to 5.6 provide an overview of the distribution of a range of environmental features in the National Park. Detailed data is available in the State of the Park Report, available from the National Park Authority.

Figure 5.1: Key baseline facts

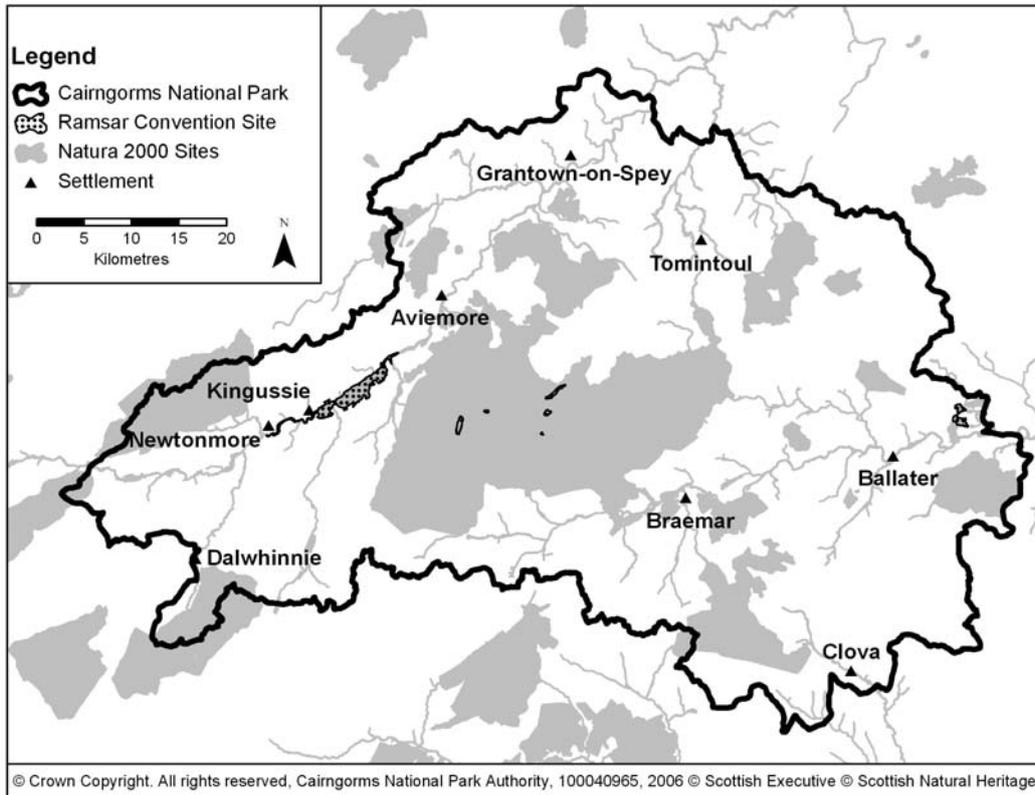
Resource	Key facts
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of UK's threatened species present. • 12.5% of Scotland's semi-natural woodland cover. • Habitat types present include: montane; dwarf shrub heath; conifer woodland; broadleaved and mixed woodland; acid grassland; fen, marsh and swamp; standing water; rivers and streams. • UK BAP Species include: upland oak and birch woodland; bog woodland (largest extent in Scotland); juniper; capercaillie; black grouse; scottish crossbill. • Habitats listed under Annex I of EU Habitats Directive include: dry heaths; alpine and boreal heaths; sub-arctic willow scrub; siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands, nardus grasslands; calcareous flushes. • Close proximity of lowground, woodland, water, upland and montane habitats.
Designated Nature Conservation Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39% of Park area designated for natural heritage. • 19 SAC sites. • 12 SPA sites. • 46 SSSIs (some of which are of geological importance). • 3 Ramsar Sites. • 6 National Nature Reserves.
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 SSSIs with soils of international importance. • 12 SSSIs with soils of national importance. • High proportion of undisturbed soils (only 2% cultivated). • Podzols form 50% of soil cover including internationally significant alpine podzols on the plateau. • Peat forms 13% of soil cover.
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2001 Census: 16,024 people. • Population density 0.04 people/Ha (lower than Scottish average). • 25.8% of population over 60 (higher than Scottish average). • Average health index in top 25% of Scotland (based on deprivation indices).

Figure 5.1: Key baseline facts...cont

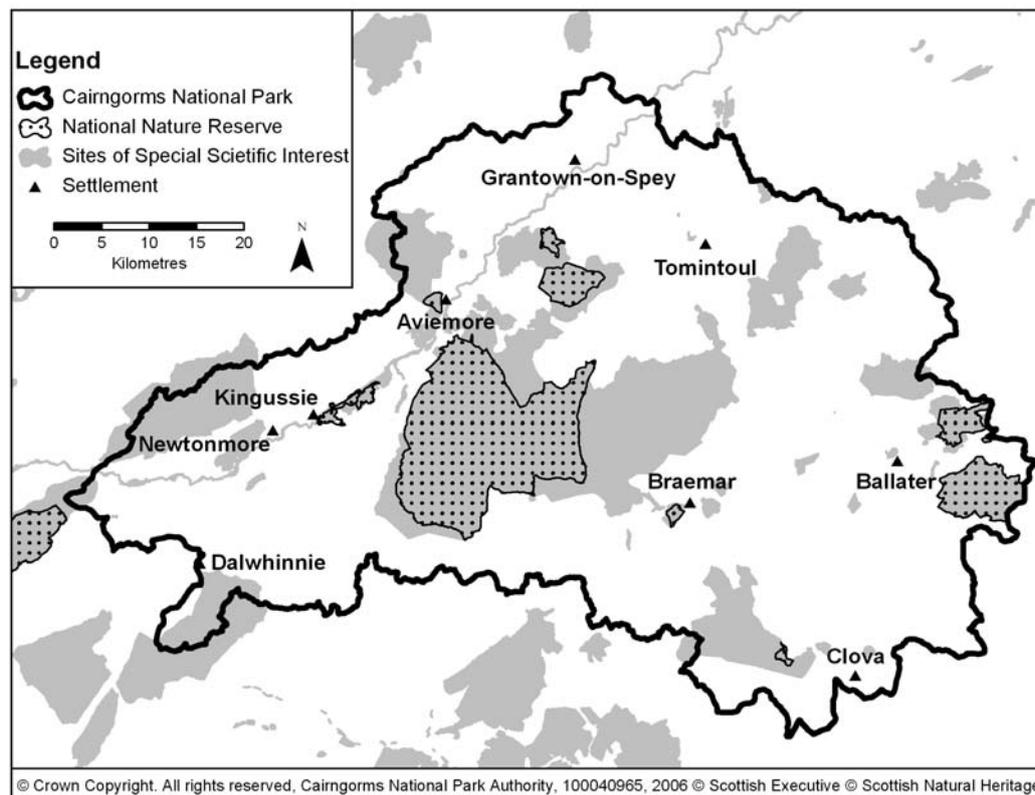
Resource	Key facts
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 designated Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes. • 60 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. • 424 listed buildings. • 3 Conservation Areas. • 4778 records in NMRS. • Large number of historic landscapes. • Potential for survival of many unknown remains in upland areas.
Earth Heritage Landforms and Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 National Scenic Areas. • 30 GCR sites (of which some are part or all SSSI). • Granite massif and plateau. • Internationally important landform record. • Coherent identity of landscape across park from landform and landcover. • Land-use cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% dwarf shrub heath; • 28% montane habitats; • 11% coniferous woodland; • 2% broadleaved/mixed woodland; • 3% improved grassland; • 0.4% built areas.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,362km of running water habitat. • 81% of streams classified as excellent (A1) or good (A2) (SEPA 2003). • 20 sq km standing waters. • Catchments of 6 major rivers.
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively low atmospheric pollution.
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual precipitation over 2250mm on summits and under 900mm in straths. • Average annual snow cover 200 days on summits and 50 days on low-ground. • Prevailing winds from south-west.
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public right of responsible access. • 49 Munros including 5 summits over 4000 feet. • 3 ski centres. • National Cycle Network Route 7. • 1 Long Distance Route (Speyside Way). • 179 Rights of Way. • Around 40 promoted path networks.
Energy and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant energy generation within the Park.
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Conservation Areas. • Distinctive local vernacular architecture.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE AND ISSUES...cont

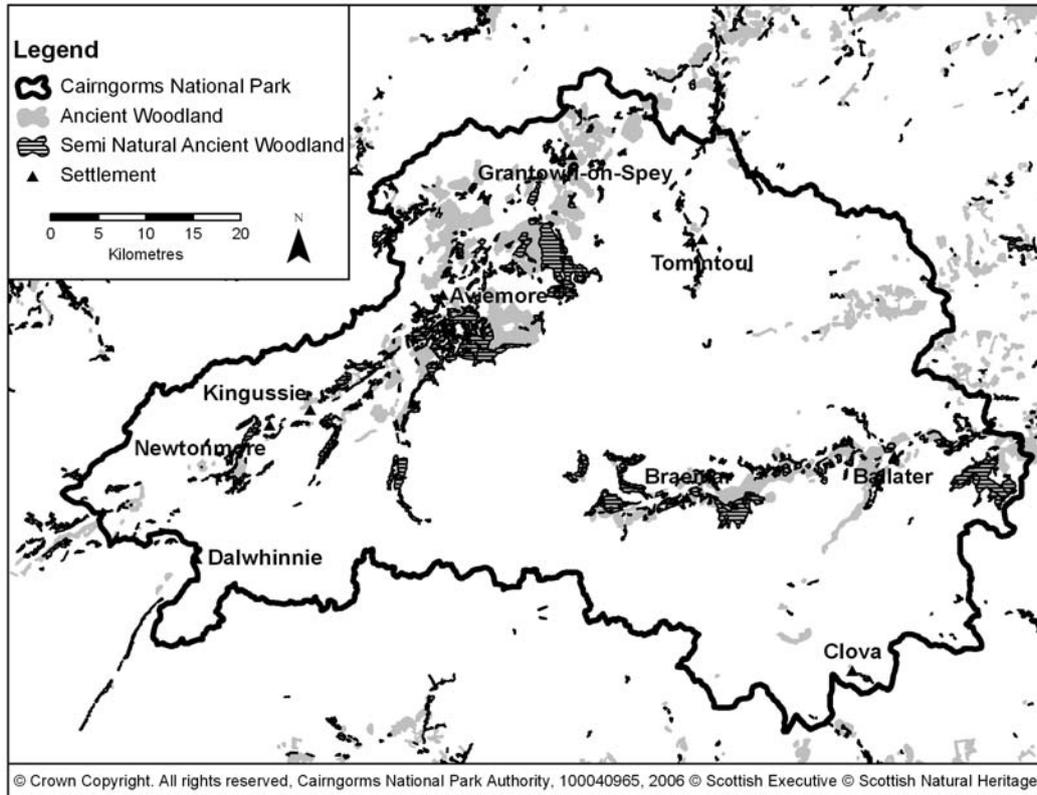
Map 5.1 International nature conservation designations



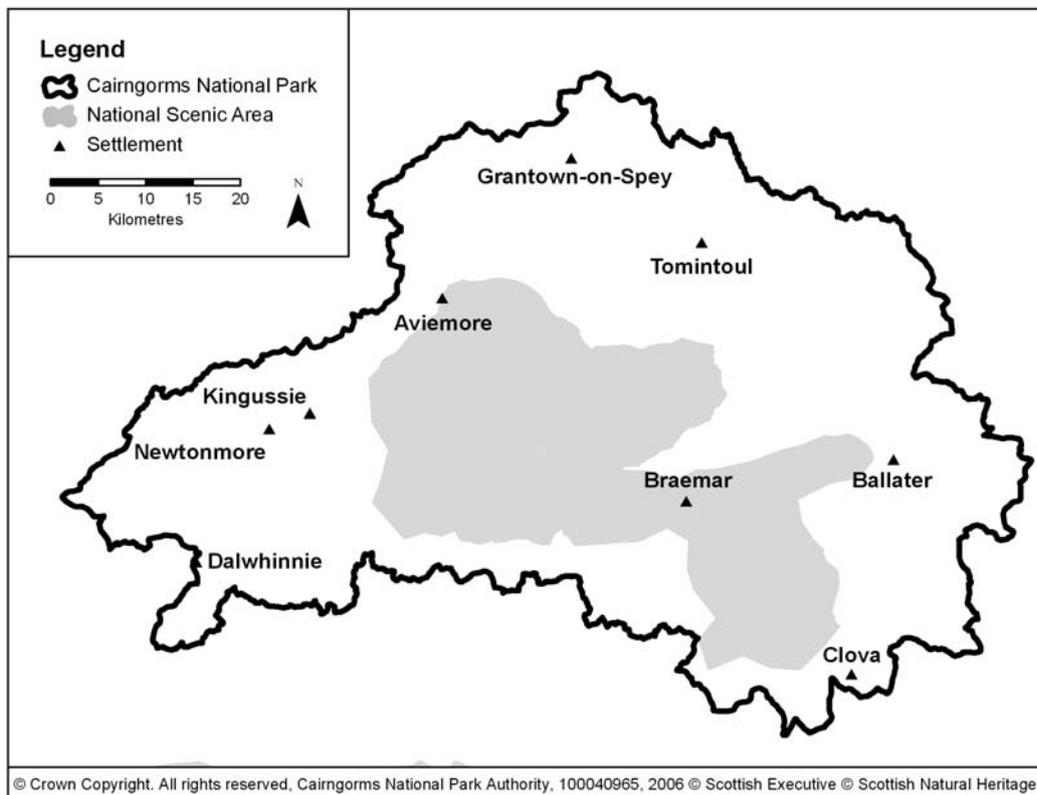
Map 5.2 National nature conservation designations



Map 5.3 Ancient woodland sites

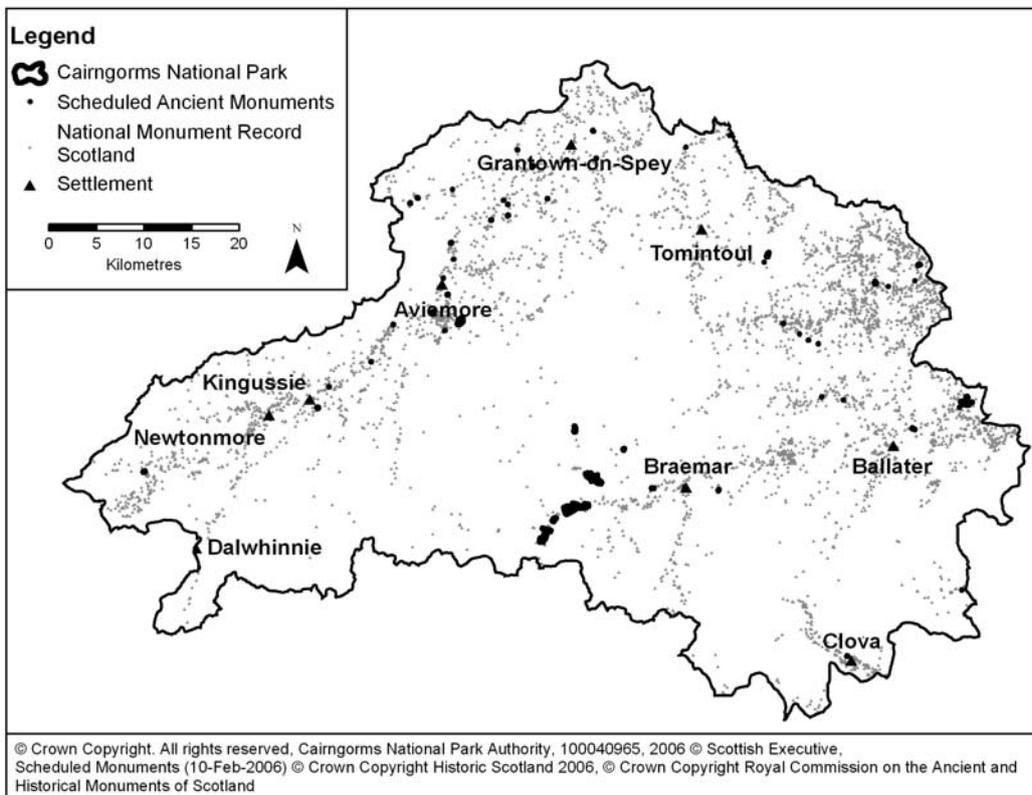


Map 5.4 National Scenic Areas

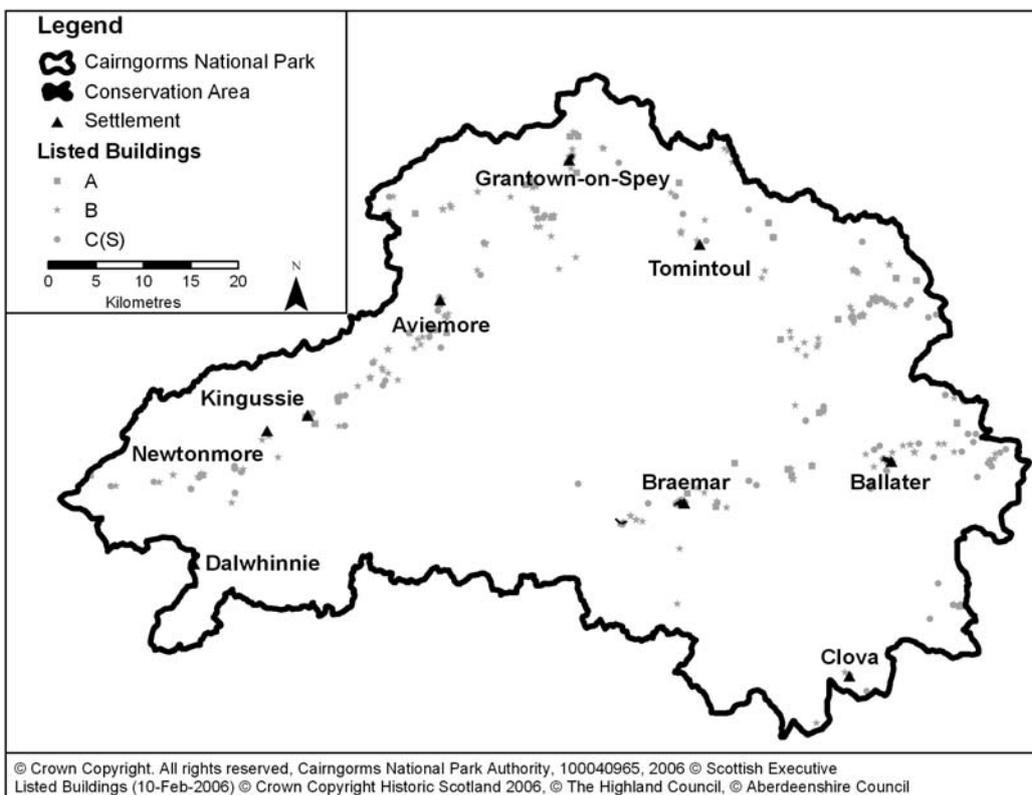


5. ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE AND ISSUES...cont

Map 5.5 Scheduled Monuments and other monument records



Map 5.6 Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas



Environmental issues in the Cairngorms National Park

5.3 The State of the Park Report and key issues research provide information on the current trends and issues in each environmental resource category in the Cairngorms. Figure 5.2 summarises the key trends and issues for each.

Figure 5.2: Key trends and issues in the Cairngorms

Resource	Key trends	Key issues
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some continued habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration • Vegetation limited by grazing pressure • Continued introductions of non-native species • Increase in native woodland cover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystem integrity and connectivity • Impact of non-native species • Impact of climate change • Impact of recreation • Impact of development • Incomplete data
Designated Nature Conservation Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing account of external impacts to sites (Nature Conservation Act 2004) • Recent expansion of Natura 2000 designations • Review of NNR designations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management practices • Long-term security of management objectives • Integration with wider land-use
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for community dynamics • Implications for development patterns • Implications for human resources
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land-use change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of new development • Extension of forest cover • Agricultural changes from CAP reform • Impact of visitors
Landforms and Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in woodland cover • Decline in heather moorland cover • Increase in research on landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of development • Recreation pressure • Connectivity of land cover • Impacts of tracks and footpaths • Renewable energy developments • Perceptions of 'wildness'

Continued over ▶

5. ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE AND ISSUES...cont

Figure 5.2: Key trends and issues in the Cairngorms...cont

Resource	Key trends	Key issues
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil erosion on higher slopes and plateaux 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of recreation • Lack of information on soil use and development
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acidification (atmospheric) • Decline in native fish stocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffuse pollution from agricultural ground • River modification • Catchment processes and flood management • Availability for consumption • Impact of recreation
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change – increasing temperature and precipitation expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atmospheric pollution
Access and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing range of outdoor recreation activities • New public right of responsible access • More managed path networks • Increased level of upland path provision and repair • Diversification of ski centres into summer activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development increasing or reducing access opportunities • Impact of access on habitats and species • Landscape impact of access infrastructure • Accessibility of environment for all
Energy and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing demand for renewable (particularly windfarm) sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential impact of transmission pylons and windfarm developments • Use of non-renewable energy sources
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandonment or conversion of farm steadings • Significant demand for new housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decay of listed buildings • Impact of development on settlement character

Limitations of data

5.4 The Cairngorms National Park is one of the most closely studied geographical areas in the UK and so has a wealth of environmental information that can be used to provide a baseline. However, a number of factors limit the value or usability of data:

- Information is fragmented across the National Park area, with some sites or areas having been more closely studied than others. Of particular relevance to the Park Plan is that the wealth of information on the uplands and mountains of the Cairngorms is not reflected in as comprehensive a manner for the straths and lowlands.
- The geography of the National Park boundary is new, and data has not been collected on this basis in the past. The Park boundary cuts across four local authority areas, and different sections of other agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage which means that data has often been collected for different areas using different standards and methodologies in the past.

- Data is held in different forms. Some data is well suited to straightforward assessment and query, whereas others are not.

Evolution of the environment without the Park Plan

5.5 The Directive requires the likely evolution of the environment without the Plan to be considered. The trends identified above are expected to continue in the absence of new policy or actions to address them. There are a number of negative trends that would reduce the special qualities of the Park and threaten its coherence and integrity over time.

5.6 The underlying purpose of the National Park designation is to integrate the management of different sectors and areas within the Park in order to take a co-ordinated approach to addressing these issues and delivering the Park aims.