

RE-EVALUATION Verifier's Report to the Evaluation Committee

Name of protected area: Cairngorms National Park Authority

Name of verifier: Richard Partington

Date of submission of re-evaluation application by protected area: 22 December 2010

Date of verification visit: 1st & 2nd March 2011

Date of completion of this report: 29 April 2011

NOTES FOR THE VERIFIER

Where is shown, verifiers are asked to indicate a score, using the following system:

- X** Not relevant
- 0** Not happening
- 1** Weak – little action
- 2** Moderate – action happening in this area, sufficient at present
- 3** Good – significant action, totally satisfactory

A star * may be added to a "3" score to indicate an excellent example of best practice (3*).

Verifiers are asked to comment on individual questions to provide further information or explanation, keeping their answers concise. In particular, the reasons for any score under 2 should be briefly explained, highlighting any particular causes for concern.

The reasons for any score of * awarded should also be explained: what makes this an example of best practice? The star should be used sparingly, and only for outstanding initiatives or actions which can serve as models at the European level.

The format for this verifier's report is linked closely to that of the Application Report completed by the protected area. You should have received the Application Report in electronic format. You may copy information from the Application Report into this report to support particular answers where this is helpful.

If you do this, we would ask you to indicate very clearly (e.g. by use of a different typeface, highlighting, etc.) the text which has been copied from the Application Report.

Your own observations relating to the information provided by the protected area and gained on site are, of course, particularly important – the Committee will have the full Application Report available to refer to as necessary.

Please attach a list of any documents received from the protected area or presented during the visit which were not included in the original application.

Programme of visit, key sites and partners visited:

Please attach a full list of people interviewed and job titles as an appendix

Date	Time	Location	Activity	
Tuesday 1 st March 2011	0740	Aviemore	Arrival Aviemore Station, off overnight sleeper train.	
	0845	Cairngorm Hotel	Pick up and travel	Chris Bremner
	0900-0945	Grantown on Spey (GoS), CEO office	CNPA CEO - Jane Hope, CEO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Overview, approach and ethos 	Jane Hope, Chris Bremner
	1000-1100	GoS Boardroom	CNPA staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Plan, PfAs • Tourism overview 	Chris Bremner, Heather Trench, Pete Crane
	1100-1130	GoS Boardroom	CNPA Convener - David Green <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national picture • “Punching above our weight?” 	David Green, Chris Bremner, Claire Ross, Andrew Rockall
	1130-1230	GoS Boardroom	CNPA staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Brand, interpretation • Strategic Land Use 	Chris Bremner Heather Trench,
	1230-1330	GoS Boardroom	Lunch (sandwiches)	Small group of local tourism businesses Keith Ballan, Andy Bateman Patrick Harrison Jackie Douglas, Murray Fergusson, Chris Bremner, Heather Trench
	1330-1400		Travel	
	1400-1530	Abernethy Forest	RSPB (NGO and land manager perspective) including tour to Ryvoan	Jeremy Roberts, Chris Bremner
	1530-1600	Ryvoan	Walk to Glenmore from Bothy	Chris Bremner
	1600-1800	Glenmore	Glenmore Lodge Principal - Bob Kinnaird <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Brand • Progress with tourism • Old Logging Way 	Chris Bremner, Murray Fergusson Bob Kinnaird

Date	Time	Location	Activity	
	1900-2100	Old Bridge Inn, Aviemore	Dinner	Chris Bremner, Murray Fergusson
Wed 2 nd March 2011	0815	Cairngorm Hotel	Pick up and travel	Chris Bremner
	0930-1000	Ballater	RDCDMO – John Carnie <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination management across the Park boundary 	Chris Bremner, John Carnie
	1000-1230	Ballater (walkabout)	Deeside/Donside Development Manager – Nick Mardall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community perspectives • Interpretation work • Path improvement work (COAT) • Travel challenges (Heather Hopper) 	Chris Bremner, Nick Mardell, Pete Crane, Bob Grant, Owen Bass
	1230-1300		Lunch (sandwiches)	Chris Bremner
	1330-1400	Tomintoul	Crown Estate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranger Services 	Pete Crane, Chris Bremner, Vicky Hilton
	1500-1700	Inverdrue	CBP - Alan Rankin, Sally Dowden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business perspective • Park-wide opportunity and challenge 	Chris Bremner, Alan Rankin, Sally Dowden
	1800-1900	Aviemore	Spare/free	
	1900-2100	Aviemore	Final thoughts and discussion	Chris Bremner,
	2130	Aviemore	Depart Aviemore Station on overnight sleeper train	

Overall Impressions

The journey to the Cairngorms National Park was undertaken by train. An overnight sleeper service 'The Caledonian' from London to my arrival station, Aviemore, in the heart of the Highlands. It was a great sense of arrival – a bright cold late winter's morning with a good covering of snow on the distant mountains. Fantastic!

The Cairngorms is a living, working landscape with wild land at its heart. The mountains that have shaped the people, culture, natural heritage, scenery and character of the area dominate and in giving its name to the Cairngorms National Park, the area is placed on the world stage and, as such, presents great opportunity.

Under Scottish legislation, it is the responsibility of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) to manage the Park in a way which draws together the wide range of public, private, community and voluntary interests. This demands an integrated approach and my impression is that CNPA is working hard at building trust with stakeholders and also at facilitating, co-ordinating and adding value to the work of others across the Cairngorms.

The enabling role adopted by the CNPA illustrates a different approach to that of most protected areas. Their journey towards excellence in sustainable tourism has been the right one for them and they have some very good examples of best practice to share. The CNPA have used the Charter and its principles as a background engine to drive forward a concept of sustainability which is relevant and appropriate. Their sustainable tourism journey over the past 5 years has not been without its challenges, yet I see the Cairngorms being in a very good place with some notable positives.

I observe the approach taken by the CNPA as very efficient and competent with many achievements – rather like a quiet, shy 'unsung hero' but I would urge them to share their work, experiences and successes with others. To offer leadership and get fully involved with the work of the EUROPARC Federation and its members explaining how and why they are using the Charter in a Cairngorms way would really be of benefit to the wider family of protected areas.

Comments on the application from the Charter area and re-evaluation visit:

A new tourism strategy and action plan was developed during 2010, under the guidance and direction of the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum (CSTF), and with full involvement from the wider tourism sector in the Park. During my visit I was particularly keen to explore:

- An overview of CNPA work (overall management, direction, approach).
- How the integrated approach (the four aims) to sustainability is working, or not.
- Relationships with partners (understanding, attitudes, approaches & actions), inc. examples.
- How tourism is organised in the Park (partners, forum, community interests).
- Working with tourism businesses; business community engagement with the Charter/sustainability principles and impact of the Park Brand.

A selection of Park strategy documents and publications were provided prior to the visit and larger selection were made available for scrutiny during the visit.

The visit was organised by Chris Bremner, the Sustainable Economy Manager for the Cairngorms National Park. During the visit I was accompanied by Chris and the logistics worked very well. The range of people that I met enabled me to gain insight and assess progress, understand the Charter journey and also to offer some suggestions. The staff of the Park and the individuals that I met were informative, candid and courteous. I would like to

thank all for giving their time and their views and to National Park Authority for their hospitality.

Verifier's assessment

Overall comment on the progress of the Charter area and its partners over the past five years:

The Cairngorms National Park (IUCN Category V) covers 4,528 sq kilometres, 5 local authority areas and 4 distinct tourism destinations. 75% of the land is privately owned with a local population of over 17,000 people. It is a mountainous area with 36% of land over 800 metres with the montane zone being the largest area of arctic mountain landscape in the British Isles. The lower areas include some of the most extensive areas of natural and semi-natural forest in the UK, two of Scotland's premier rivers (the Spey and the Dee), many scenic straths and glens and a number of lochs, some of which are used actively for water based recreation.

The Cairngorms contains 25% of Britain's threatened species – two thirds of these are of Europe-wide importance. A significant proportion of the land area within the Park has a natural heritage designation. It is one of the best places to see the Scottish crossbill, red grouse, golden eagle, osprey, dotterel, capercaillie, and crested tit and is home to a wide variety of mammals, including pine martens, red squirrels, wildcats, water vole and otters. This richness provides a clear tourism opportunity as well as a major responsibility for effective conservation and management.

Annual visitors are estimated at just under 1.5 million. With over 300 accommodation providers in the National Park, ranging from 5 star hotels to 1 star youth hostels and everything in between, there is something for all budgets.

The CNPA is governed by a Board of 19 members (some appointed & some elected) and a staff team of just under 60. Largely funded by the Scottish government the annual CNPA budget is approximately £5.5 million. The Park Authority needs to achieve the 4 aims set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in a collective and co-ordinated way. (see 1.3)

The CNPA has deliberately kept its staffing and operation small and has created, in ethos and in practice, an approach as an enabling organisation. For example it has, over the past 5 years, built trust with other public and private sector interests and now works with/through five Advisory Forums: Sustainable Tourism Forum; Cairngorms Deer Action Group; Land Managers Forum; Local Outdoor Access Forum; and Inclusive Cairngorms. CNPA has had the confidence to encourage others to provide services for access, visitor centres, Rangers and helped to create a strong business partnership and a Cairngorms brand with shared values and collective enthusiasm about the place.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas was originally awarded to the Cairngorms in 2005. They were the first national park in the UK to receive the award and it helped inform much of the early work around tourism in their first National Park Plan which was published in 2007. The plan was not just a strategy for the CNPA but a Plan for the area, developed in partnership with 16 other public agencies. Thinking is underway around how the structure of the next Park Plan 2012 -17: a sustainable destination; a low carbon park and; enhancing the Cairngorms special qualities. I welcome this simplicity and clarity of early thinking.

David Green, CNPA Convener, underlined, to me, the support and commitment of his Board to sustainable tourism by quoting, in Gaelic, some local philosophy "*leave something for the other man*". But in leaving something visitors, first, have to come and experience the

Cairngorms. He believes the place is for everybody, from young people learning about themselves through adventure to others enjoying the taste of local food, hospitality and culture. He explained with passion that the Cairngorms is an 'iconic brand' – its land management creating food, together with conservation and recreational products create an integrated and sustainable model. Politically and environmentally this model needs to succeed.

There are still areas for further work but the CNPA and its partners have made great progress in sustainable tourism development assisted by the Charter, its principles and approach. Together they have quietly and efficiently been working to create some excellent practice examples that fit the Cairngorms ethos and place. However they are also part of a wider European network which, I suggest, would greatly benefit from seeing and learning about what they are doing, particularly the working with businesses and in creating a 'brand' identity. I encourage the CNPA to engage with other protected areas and share their experience and wisdom so that others can also benefit.

Main strengths: (relating to the Charter process and related tourism activities in this Charter area)

Overall the CNPA is well governed and managed and is held in high regard. Its work on influencing land management and conservation through to encouraging outdoor activities and supporting sustainable tourism is very positive. In seeing the whole picture, enabling and supporting others as well as understanding the economic importance of all sectors, it is really helpful and a key strength.

The development of the Cairngorms Business Partnership and the Cairngorms Brand along with the work of the Sustainable Tourism Forum illustrates, very well, the interconnected nature of tourism organisations across the Cairngorms. In the new Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan this arrangement is continued and strengthened. This is a particular strength of the area and an approach from which other protected areas may learn.

Specifically I see the main strengths being:

- their enabling approach, energy and commitment
- their well governed, managed and structured approach with financial leverage
- their work with businesses (CBP)
- the development of a Cairngorms Brand
- the work on an outdoor access delivery model (COAT)
- the co-ordination of Ranger services using the new brand identity

Main weaknesses: (relating to the Charter process and related tourism activities in this Charter area)

- A scoping study in 2009 on a Park-wide visitor payback scheme concluded that there was little appetite for such a scheme - I was disappointed that more progress had not been made
- There was a notable absence of mention or promotion of the Charter as the premier European quality label for sustainable tourism in protected areas. This should be remedied as part of a new move to connect customers/visitors easily to sustainable destinations. E.g. A guide to Protected Areas and companies awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – how to get there sustainably and what to do/stay/eat etc.

- The future strategy and action plan is not explicit on the intentions for provision of information and facilities for disabled people or economically disadvantaged people – this may be an oversight but equally may be considered mainstream as legislation and an inclusive approach is now common place.
- The CNPA say in their self evaluation questionnaire that as they do not employ front-line staff they have not undertaken or developed any training in sustainable tourism. They see themselves as an enabling organisation with no directly managed ranger service or visitor centres so they rely on working in partnership bringing people together and giving them the support they need to deliver sustainable tourism in practice. I wonder if this question is interpreted too literally as they do have core staff that do need to be aware of this work activity and to understand the principles of sustainable tourism and the approach taken in the Cairngorms. Perhaps, in the future, they need to look at this and ensure all staff and Members of CNPA are understanding of the approach to sustainable tourism particularly as they have an interesting model, excellence in outcomes which needs to be shared locally, nationally and internationally.
- A comprehensive Visitor Management Plan was missing and I would ask the Cairngorms to consider whether they need a full plan incorporating a needs analysis, a strategic view and better evidence. The new tourism action plan (4b) goes some way to addressing this but perhaps, through the development of the Park Plan and using the concept idea of a sustainable destination a better visitor management plan should emerge.

Conclusions and recommendations for the Charter area:

In addition to the points made in the strengths and weaknesses above and in the challenges (2.5) below I suggest the following recommendations are considered:

- CNPA must ensure the CBP remains a key partner in areas such as marketing and training and in developing the Cairngorms Marketing Framework alongside the delivery of the 2011-2015 Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
- The strong linkages between the Park Authority and the CBP must be used to start a conversation around how the Cairngorms can become a quality and sustainable destination within a low carbon economy. Higher costs of oil will present real challenges and diversity of views for much of the 'conversation' will be around transport, its interconnectivity and how customers arrive.
- Co-ordination and retention of 'buy-in' from national public-sector organisations, who have staff working on diverse issues and projects within the Park, is a major challenge as is the continual churn of business folk. Perhaps a simple 'sustainable tourism story', explanation or training about the past journey and the agreed destination of travel (for public sector and for new business people) to understand how they can get involved and contribute may be helpful e.g. to 'walk the talk'!
- Building on the point above - raising awareness and understanding for all staff and Members of CNPA of the principles of sustainable tourism and the approach taken in the Cairngorms is very important. The Cairngorms has an interesting model with excellence in outcomes and this needs to be understood within the CNPA and then it can be easily shared locally, nationally and internationally.

- To achieve a cohesive and functioning community CNPA must work with partners and stakeholders in four key socio/economic areas: (i) Broadband; (ii) Transport links; (iii) Housing and; (iv) Jobs.
- More imagination/creativity is required during the next five years to really progress and generate support through 'Payback Schemes' from visitors and businesses so that tangible contributions can be seen – perhaps new technologies such as Phone Apps (e.g. *Text yes £5*) could be embraced.
- The new Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is weak on activities for economically disadvantaged people. Perhaps this is worth looking at again.
- More should be made locally of the Charter as the premier European quality label for sustainable tourism in protected areas. Perhaps in collaborating with EUROPARC to connect customers/visitors easily to sustainable destinations. E.g. A guide to Protected Areas and companies awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – how to get there sustainably and what to do/stay/eat etc.
- An easy, integrated method of making reservations to and in the Cairngorms for accommodation, activities, rail and bus travel should be developed. Also action to upgrade and secure modern rail sleeper services should be a priority if the concept of a 'sustainable destination' is to be realised.

General information about the Charter area - Section A of questionnaire

- I. **Has full and clear factual information been supplied by the Charter area in answer to sections A1 – A14 of the Application Report framework? [3]**
- Yes. Excellent, clear, detailed and accurate information was provided before, during and, indeed, after the verification visit
- II. **Additional/amended information not contained in the protected area's application:**
- None
- III. **Any information not available, and reasons for this:**
- None as far as I could ascertain.
- IV. **Are you satisfied that the information supplied is accurate? [3]**
- Yes.
- V. **Are there any factual issues that might affect the eligibility of the protected area for re-award of the Charter?**
- None as far as I could ascertain.

Meeting the Charter principles - Section B of questionnaire

*Note: Areas in **grey shading** indicate particularly important points which are critical for successful evaluation. They correspond to the shaded areas in the Application Report. **NEVER type within the shaded area**, please.*

Principle 1 – Partnership with local tourism stakeholders

- 1.1 Briefly describe the current structure of the forum (or equivalent arrangement) through which the protected-area authority works with others on the development and management of tourism, including current size and membership, frequency of meetings, etc.: [3]**

The Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum (CSTF) is the body that provides strategic direction and oversight for tourism related issues. It meets 3 times a year and consists of 19 members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Its Chair Jackie Douglas, a CNPA member, secures close links between the Park and other

interests.

Its purpose is 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 and specifically its role is to:

- Advise on the development of the strategy for sustainable tourism
- Advise each other and CNPA on issues relating to sustainable tourism
- Provide a mechanism for cross-sector discussion and consultation on sustainable tourism issues

How has this forum developed or changed over the past five years (in terms of its work, membership and the partnerships within it)?

The forum in its current form was established in early 2010, and is similar to the ViSIT Forum which was in existence at the time of the first Charter application in 2005. In keeping with modern practice the new Forum is smaller than the one it replaced.

Between 2007-2009 a range of advisory forums and delivery groups were set up aligned to the wider National Park Plan objectives. While successful in some ways, it was acknowledged that tourism issues were spread across various groups and this was leading to some stakeholder confusion. The current forum was set-up to address this.

1.2 Are local tourism enterprises involved? [3]

Yes. Local tourism businesses are represented on the CSTF and are also consulted where activity relates to their specific sector or geographical location.

Wider engagement has been achieved with the creation of the Cairngorms Brand identity for the National Park, distinct from the National Park Authority. This has drawn, so far, 230 applications to use the brand, including 148 individual businesses and 22 business or tourist associations. See below for more information on this.

Please describe how the Charter area has progressed and strengthened relationships with local businesses:

During my visit I was struck by two big paradigm shifts challenging the approach, attitudes and fortunes of tourism. Firstly the drive and enthusiasm to develop positive businesses involvement through the creation of the Cairngorms Business Partnership and, secondly, the creation of a Brand identity for the entire Cairngorms.

The CNPA and its partners have worked hard at building good relationships and particularly, over the 5-year period of the 2005-2010 strategy and action plan, the business community of the CNP has slowly come together in a variety of sectoral and geographical bodies.

However, the development of the new Tourism strategy during 2010 and the mid-term review in 2008, both confirm that the promotion and development of sustainable tourism has progressed well but there is a notable absence of mention or promotion of the Charter as the premier European quality label for sustainable tourism in protected areas. This should be remedied as part of a new move to connect customers/visitors easily to sustainable destinations. E.g. A guide to Protected Areas and companies awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – how to get there sustainably and what to do/stay/eat etc.

Have any schemes been set up to link businesses more closely with the Charter area/Charter implementation?

Such schemes are not obligatory for re-award of the Charter

Two schemes in particular have been developed which bring businesses closer to the goals of the protected area and specifically towards the principles of sustainability. Firstly the development of a Brand identity for the National Park and secondly the creation of the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP)

Recognising that there is a considerable difference between the CNPA - a public body, and the Cairngorms National Park – a special geographic place, a Cairngorms Brand was designed and is available for use by any business or project that meets quality and environmental standards. The brand presents a range of services to visitors across the Park, for example, from walking paths to restaurants and bus transport to local food products. It is available for businesses to use in their marketing, if they agree to meet certain quality and environmental standards. So far 230 businesses have been registered and they receive a Brand Welcome Pack including visitor information, towel agreement cards, window stickers, responsible tourism guides, and a *Sustainable Tourism for Dummies* booklet. This ‘dummies’ guide is an excellent example of good practice.

Gradually, during the past 5-year period the business community around the Cairngorms, historically divided by the mountains at the areas heart, have come together. The CBP was formed in 2009 it is a Park-wide initiative with around 300 members. A separate destination management organisation currently operates in the Royal Deeside area however the intention is to include this grouping into the CBP.

The CBP provides a strong, consistent voice embracing all businesses, with a commitment to the aims of the CNP and understands the importance that sustainable tourism makes. It will be a key delivery partner in areas such as marketing and training and has three roles: promotion and marketing; destination development and; advocacy.

1.3 Has involvement of the following key groups progressed satisfactorily over the past five years?

Yes. it is the responsibility of the CNPA, under Scottish legislation, to manage the Park in a way which draws together the wide range of public, private, community and voluntary interests. The four aims for managing National Parks in Scotland are to:

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

Achieving all four aims together therefore demands an integrated approach and CNPA is working very well at facilitating, co-ordinating and adding value to the work of others within the Park.

1.3.1 The local community? [3]

The CNPA operate a number Advisory Forums which help link local people with specialist knowledge to the work of the park. These are: the Sustainable Tourism Forum; the Cairngorms Deer Action Group; the Land Managers Forum; the Local Outdoor Access Forum; and Inclusive Cairngorms.

The Association of Cairngorms Communities (ACC) was set-up around the time of National Park designation to allow the many community councils within the National Park to work together on shared issues and present a strong voice to the CNPA and others. There are currently 4 representatives of ACC on the Sustainable Tourism Forum.

CNPA has undertaken extensive community consultation for various pieces of work with links to tourism, including the Local Development Plan, National Park Plan and Core Paths Plan. Individual communities have also gone through a process of community action planning.

1.3.2 Conservation interests? [3]

Scottish Environment LINK, a network of conservation organisations, was represented on all incarnations of the Sustainable Tourism Forum. CNPA has also worked with conservation organisations on various projects with links to tourism, for example on visitor wildlife recording. It should be noted that the CNPA also has responsibility for conservation of species, habitats, landscape and cultural heritage and through its management of the area has to take into account a wider set of interests as set out in the 4 aims set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in a collective and co-ordinated way. (See 1.3 above)

1.3.3 Wider (regional) bodies responsible for tourism, conservation and regional development? [3]

The main management strategy for the area is the National Park Plan published in 2007. It is not just a strategy for the CNPA but was developed in partnership with 16 other public agencies: the 4 Local Authorities, and 2 Enterprise Agencies which cover part of the National Park; Communities Scotland; Deer Commission for Scotland; Forestry Commission; Historic Scotland; Scottish Environmental Protection Agency; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish Water; Sport Scotland,; UHI Millennium Institute; and Visit Scotland.

1.3.4 Any other key groups (please state which), either within or outside the formal partnership structure described above, which have been actively involved? [3]

Over the past 2 years, many of the organisations described in 1.3.3 above, together with individual businesses have come together as the Cairngorms Business Partnership. The 300 strong membership of the CBP provides a strong, consistent business voice with a commitment to the aims of the CNP and to the importance of sustainable tourism. Looking ahead, the CBP will be a key delivery partner in areas such as marketing and training with the Cairngorms Marketing Framework being developed alongside the 2011-2015 Sustainable Tourism Strategy creating strong linkages between them.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 enshrined the right of responsible access in law. As the statutory Outdoor Access Authority, CNPA developed an Outdoor Access Strategy and Core Paths Plan, but, as an enabling organisation did not see itself to

undertake repair and/or develop path networks on the ground.

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) came into being in 2008. It evolved from an existing organisation called the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) which had been doing similar work since 2000, but only in the Eastern Cairngorms, and thus provided a sound basis for further expansion into the remainder of the Park

As an arms-length charitable trust COAT can draw funding from a variety of sources, and for every £1 that CNPA invests, another £4 is attracted from elsewhere. It has 5 aims:

- To upgrade and develop community path networks
- To repair upland paths
- To develop health walks
- To deliver strategic long-distance routes
- To provide information about outdoor access

Principle 2 – Sustainable tourism strategy and action plans

Implementation over the past 5 years

2.1 Overall comment on the progress of the Charter area towards excellence in sustainable tourism, bearing in mind where it started from five years ago

The mid-term review of the Strategy in 2008 and the development of the new strategy during 2010, together with the broader enabling role of the CNPA illustrate that the journey towards excellence in sustainable tourism has been the right one with some very good examples of best practice to share. The CNPA have used the Charter and its principles as a background engine to drive forward a concept of sustainability which is relevant and appropriate to them. Their sustainable tourism journey over the past 5 years has not been without its challenges, yet I see the Cairngorms being in a very good place with some notable positives – see 2.4 for details.

I observe the approach taken by the CNPA as very efficient and competent with many achievements – rather like a quiet, shy ‘unsung hero’ and I would urge them to share their work, experiences and successes with others. To offer leadership and get fully involved with the work of EUROPARC Federation and its members explaining how and why they are using the Charter in a Cairngorms way would really be of benefit to the wider family of protected areas.

In recognition of their work over the past 5 years the Cairngorms National Park [was one of 3 finalists, in 2007, for the Royal Destination Award for Sustainable Tourism, a Europe-wide initiative, and in 2009 we were nominated and long-listed for a Responsible Tourism Award.](#)

2.2 Could all of the planned actions be implemented? If not, how much of the action plan was implemented (estimate)?

Yes a very good ‘strike rate’ of 99% of the actions in the 2005 action plan have been implemented.

2.3 Main reason for the Charter area not being able to complete the full programme (if applicable)?

Only one action has not been progressed at all...engagement with coach operators. It was decided to postpone work on this until guidelines for ECSTPA Stage III become available [from the EUROPARC Federation].

2.4 What are the most positive achievements in your view?

I consider the following as highlights:

- their enabling approach, energy and commitment
- their well governed, managed and structured approach with financial leverage
- their work with businesses (the CBP)
- the development of a Cairngorms Brand
- the work on an outdoor access delivery model (COAT)
- the co-ordination of Ranger services using the new brand identity

2.5 What are the main challenges still faced?

The CNPA consider the co-ordination and retention of 'buy-in' from national public-sector organisations, which have staff working on diverse issues and projects within the park, to be a major challenge. To that I would add what I learnt, during the visit, was also the potential challenge of dealing with the continual 'churning' of private business folk. The average turnover of businesses is three years and the continual engagement and explanation of the issues and the approaches taken (around sustainable tourism) is a large staff commitment and a resource challenge not to be underestimated

Perhaps a simple printed sustainable tourism story or explanation of the past journey and the agreed destination of travel for new people to understand how they can get involved and contribute may be helpful.

Monitoring results

2.6 Has the Charter area monitored the results of its action plan over the past five years? [3]

Monitoring has been carried out in the context of the National Park Plan, the main management strategy for the National Park, and has included a visitor survey, STEAM modelling and an Economic & Social Health report

Recommendations from the verifier and Evaluation Committee

2.7 Have the specific recommendations made by the verifier and Evaluation Committee at original evaluation 5 years ago been addressed?

There were no recommendations made

Please list the recommendations and give a score for each:

See above

Resources for implementation

2.8 How did the budget available for implementation of the action plan develop over the past five years?

Sufficient financial resources for implementation of the plan were allocated by CNPA and partners throughout the delivery period.

2.9 Were the financial resources available for implementation more, less or the same as originally planned?

Yes. about the same

2.10 Were they sufficient for implementation of the plan?

Yes. The CNPA total budget is approximately £5million annually and is (in part) used to lever in more resources. Because of their enabling approach of delivery through others it means that they have no assets or any liabilities which offers more scope and flexibility to steer resources where they are needed.

2.11 Have there been changes in staffing levels, both in the Charter area generally and in the staff dealing with tourism issues, over the past five years?

Staff numbers increased slightly shortly after the Strategy and Action Plan was agreed, as CNPA (at the time a relatively new organisation) reached full staffing levels. In late 2010, a round of voluntary redundancies reduced staff numbers slightly, and this has impacted on tourism staffing levels.

2.12 Has the level of staffing affected implementation of the action plan?

No

Plans for the next five years

Revision of strategy, new action plan

2.13 Has the tourism strategy been revised for the next five years? [3]

Yes.. revised and updated during 2010

2.14 Has a new action plan been prepared for the Charter area and its partners? [3]

Yes.. a final approved version in January 2011 and it runs until 2016.

2.15 How are the strategy and new action plan presented (in terms of documents)?

In one self contained document entitled A Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2011 -2016.

2.16 Briefly describe the process(es) and timetable(s) for both reviewing/revising the strategy and developing the new action plan with the partners, making reference to the forum or partnership structures described under question B1 above and the involvement of local stakeholders.

The 2005-10 Sustainable Tourism Strategy was reviewed in 2008 and has been revised during 2010. CNPA commissioned The Tourism Company to produce

the draft strategy and action plan under the guidance of the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum.

Extensive consultation was undertaken with the tourism industry at local and regional levels, wider related business interests, communities and public sector partners. All are represented on the CSTF and took part in a series of workshops and discussions. The draft strategy was also open to public consultation. The revised strategic objectives are:

1. Tourism growth.
2. Customer focus.
3. Special qualities.
4. Geographical diversity.
5. Environmental impact.
6. Leadership and partnership.

2.17 How does the tourism strategy relate to the protected-area management plan?

Gaining the Charter in 2005 helped inform much of the early work around tourism in their first National Park Plan which was published in 2007. Currently the next National Park Plan for 2012-17 is being drafted now. Consultation is ongoing but it is expected to have three main themes: sustainable destination, low carbon economy and enhancing the special qualities.

The tourism strategy will form the core of the sustainable destination theme but will remain as a stand-alone document. The use of the same strategic objectives and outcomes will ensure coherence between them. There are also key links to other areas in the Park Plan that will be made clear as the draft develops. The Action Plan will also be kept as a stand-alone document to enable detailed negotiations and joint action with partners to develop over time.

2.18 Are there any apparent contradictions between tourism and protected-area management objectives and actions?

No.

Assessment (see notes in self-assessment questionnaire)

2.19 Has there been any further assessment of natural and cultural resources, their sensitivities (capacity) and opportunities for tourism? [3]

The 2006 *State of the Park* report gave comprehensive baseline information themed around Natural resources, Cultural resources, Visitor & Recreation resources and Socio-Economic resources. The second *State of the Park* report will be published in 2011

Site condition monitoring for Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Landscape Character Assessment and; Visitor Survey data on visitor 'likes' about the area.

'Economic & Social Health of the Cairngorms National Park' report 2010 and; Cairngorms Business Partnership 'Business Barometer

2.20 Has there been any further assessment of visitor patterns and needs? [3]

Visitor Survey 2009/10
'Delivering an Outstanding Visitor Experience' project gathered data from visitors.
STEAM data collated annually
Traffic counters

2.21 Has there been any further assessment of future visitor markets offering potential? [3]

Yes. Visit Scotland research on customer segmentation and the Cairngorms Business Partnership marketing framework.

Implementation

2.22 Does the new action plan include an indication of phasing/staging of action over time? [3]

Yes, in a priority order format, yet recognising all are important. However some specific date planning (rather than high, low or medium) would be tighter.

2.23 Does the action plan indicate the relevant stakeholders or partners for each action? [3]

Yes. a lead partner is always identified as well other key partners

2.24 What is the size of the budget that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the new action plan per year, excluding staff costs?

The operational budget for 2010/11 is £1.9 million with approximately £764,000 available for the action Plan in 2011/12. It could be anticipated that this figure is broadly similar future years but are forecast to be less by around 5% in line with national financial settlements.

What is this as a percentage of its total budget?

Approximately 40%

2.25 Have funds been provided (or are they being sought) from other sources?

£1.1 million is the expected Scottish Government direct funding. Additional funds will be levered in from other sources for specific project activity. In some cases, such as CNPA support towards path maintenance, this leverage can be as high as 1:4.

2.26 Do you judge the level of funding already secured/applied for to be sufficient to meet the action proposed? [3]

Yes, and because of their enabling approach of delivery through others it means that they have no assets or any liabilities which offers more scope and flexibility to steer resources where they are needed.

2.27 What is the staffing that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan?

Approximately 8 FTEs

2.28 Is staffing being provided from other sources?

Yes. most likely but for specific project activity but will depend on individual negotiations

2.29 Do you believe the action proposed can be implemented with this level of staffing?

Yes.. perfectly adequate

Commitment of partners

2.30 Is there a good indication of commitment from other partners to implementing the new action plan? [3]

Yes, there is strong commitment from key partners. E.g. the Cairngorms Business Partnership for visitor facing/marketing activities, the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust for footpath repair and maintenance and the Soil Association Scotland for specific action on local food. They also work positively with partners that have signed up to the National Park Plan, collectively through the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum and individually on a project by project basis.

2.31 Does the Charter area have any formal arrangements with partners for implementation of this action plan?

Detailed funding agreements are in place or being finalised in early 2011 for the CBP to develop visitor facing marketing work including website enhancement, research and customer feedback, staff support and training; COAT for paths work and related activity; and, Soil Association Scotland for implementation of the Food for Life Development Plan. Negotiations with other partners are ongoing

Monitoring results

2.32 Have indicators been identified for monitoring the results of the strategy/new action plan? [2]

Yes.. the detailed measurement of each indicator will be subject to further discussion and refinement with appropriate partners

2.33 Comment briefly on the planned level and methodology of monitoring.

These are set out in the 2011-2016 Strategy and Action Plan under each of the 6 Strategic Objectives (SOs). Each SO has a short description, a clear outcome and associated indicators.

The Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2016 is a comprehensive document but the indicators/measurement component under each of the six strategic objectives are, perhaps, the weakest element with detail yet to be added. Particularly

the starting point or baseline data. I expect this information is available and I would urge early setting of the measurements through discussions with partners.

Addressing key issues

Specific action that the Charter looks for in the action plan, Principles 3 to 10

A: *Progress over the past five years*

B: *Level of implementation of action plan*

C: *Planned activity in new plan*

N.B. In the Self Assessment questionnaire from principle 3 to 10 the Cairngorms simply cross referenced the Action numbers from the past and from the future action plans. This made it difficult to easily see progress and future action without continual referencing three documents.

Therefore I have provided a brief summary from the documents to help the Evaluation Committee get a flavour of past and future activities. It has made the document longer but, I hope, easier to understand and evaluate.

Principle 3 – Protecting natural and cultural heritage

3.1 Monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations A [3] B [3] C [3]

Particularly relevant monitoring on the condition of designated sites, the number and nature of outdoor access issues and tourism numbers and distribution. 2 major pieces of research, both updates of previous baseline studies: The Economic & Social Health of the Cairngorms National Park and the Cairngorms Visitor Survey – a useful summary document is available.

3.2 Encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions A [3] B [3] C [3]

Good practice examples include: *Interpretation guidance Sharing the Stories of the Cairngorms National Park*, published 2009 and on-site interpretation at Ruthven Barracks (Historic Scotland) and Insh Marshes (RSPB).

Pleasing to note that a future high priority is strengthening the opportunities to experience local culture.

3.3 Action to control development (including tourism) which would adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise A [3] B [3] C [2]

CNPA is the planning authority and local plan came into force from October 2010 plus extra guidance on natural heritage, water resources and sustainable design available. This legal responsibility should be sufficient to balance future interests but always needs attention.

3.4 Action to reduce tourism activities which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise A [3] B [3] C [3]

Strengthening membership of the Green Tourism Business Scheme has been encouraged, including through seminars and first year discounts and it is a condition for business use of the Cairngorms brand which is a key deliverable for better environmental management

Many seminars and gateway opportunities were created to promote sound environmental management through training and funding including: [Energy Saving Trust](#), [Community Recycling Network Scotland](#), [Abertay Centre for the Environment](#), [Green Business UK](#), [Business Gateway](#)

N.B. this is an area of where other schemes or quality labels are used supplementary to the Charter.

3.5 Encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation (e.g. “visitor payback” schemes) A [2] B [2] C [2]

Visitors contribute through car parking and other smaller schemes. A scoping study in 2009 on a Park-wide visitor payback scheme concluded that there was little appetite for such a scheme. More imagination/creativity is required during the next five years to progress ‘support’ from visitors and businesses and that tangible contributions can be seen (4d).

Principle 4 – Meeting visitor needs/quality of experience

4.1 Surveys to measure visitor satisfaction A [3] B [3] C [3]

A park-wide visitor survey of 2500 face-to-face interviews ran from May 2009 – April 2010, using the 2003/04 survey as a baseline. The CBP has been using hand-held electronic devices to capture visitor feedback as part of the DOVE (Delivering an Outstanding Visitor Experience) project. A full review of visitor information was carried out in 2007... leading to improvements to the print provision about the Park.

Further reviews and a regular programme of surveys and visitor feedback are planned from 2011.

**4.2 Assessment of future visitor markets and their needs
A [3] B [3] C [2]**

In addition to 4.1 above a new Park-specific ‘Good Practice’ award has been considered, but CNPA have sponsored the existing local award ‘Most Enterprising Business in the Great Outdoors’ 2010 at the Highlands & Islands Tourism Awards.

Discussions on Charter Part II have taken place but not taken forward to avoid confusion with existing work on the CNP brand. However a discussion with the Brand Management Group is scheduled for early 2011 and again I would suggest some creativity in application and keep close to the EUROPARC Federation emerging approach to Charter part II

N.B. this is also an area of where other schemes or quality labels are used supplementary to the Charter.

4.3 Specific provision of facilities and information for disabled people

A [3] B [3] C [1]

An 'Inclusive Cairngorms' Forum meets quarterly to advise CNPA and partners on inclusion issues. Membership is drawn from a range of under-represented groups, including people with disabilities, young people, minority ethnic groups and those on low incomes.

'Park for All' checklists have been produced ...and are available. Disability Discrimination Act seminars have been held for businesses.

The future strategy and action plan is not explicit on the intentions for provision of information and facilities for disabled people – this may be an oversight but equally may be considered mainstream as legislation and an inclusive approach is now common place.

4.4 Provision of facilities for economically disadvantaged people

A [2] B [3] C [1]

Whilst much promotional activity takes place for the mid and higher range of spending visitor the Cairngorms is a place that can be enjoyed at low cost (walking, cycling etc.) The 'Cairngorms on a Shoestring' was developed to attract economically disadvantaged people.

A web portal www.cairngormsonline.co.uk/cairngormsonashoestring provides information on free walks and activities along with links to low-cost accommodation. Also a leaflet published by the CNPA 'The Cairngorms Explorer' describes travel without a car and includes illustrative walks and cycle rides utilising public transport.

The new action plan (5c) talks about promotion of local access and long distance routes but no specific new or targeted activities for economically disadvantaged people. Perhaps this may be a subject worth looking at again during the next five years.

4.5 Action to monitor the quality of facilities and services

A [2] B [3] C [3]

A Park-wide visitor survey of 2500 face-to-face interviews from May 2009 – April 2010, using the 2003/04 survey as a baseline. The Cairngorms Business Partnership used hand-held electronic devices to capture informal visitor feedback via TICs, accommodation hosts etc. as part of the Delivering an Outstanding Visitor Experience project.

In the new plan significant attention is given (section 8) to gathering knowledge about tourism and its impact and a number of actions and activities are planned.

4.6 Action to improve the quality of facilities and services

A [2] B [2] C [3]

There are numerous hospitality schemes in Scotland e.g. A 'Hundred Thousand Welcomes' tourism leadership programme, 'Pride & Passion' workshops and 'Hospitality Assured / Service Achievement' award. These have been promoted

locally along with the CBP own package of training and development work for businesses including 'Park Aware' training. The coordinating role of the Park Plan and park staff have brought together public amenity and service managers to undertake an improvement programme.

The forward plan places much emphasis on coordination of business support, advice and training and on helping local people develop appropriate skills. It also supports appropriate business infrastructure such as transport, broadband and affordable housing for staff working in tourism.

Principle 5 – Communication about the area

5.1 Sensitive promotion of the Charter area as a destination using authentic images and reflecting capacity/needs of the area, including times and locations A [2] B [2] C [3]

Over the past 5 years some good practice has taken place to promote the area as one place e.g. Interpretation guidance, '*Sharing the Stories of the Cairngorms National Park*' published 2009; VisitScotland produced one Cairngorms Visitor Guide whereas previously the Park was divided between several different area guides; The CBP have a Park-wide Marketing Framework giving a clear and consistent context for future marketing work.

The co-ordinated approach by the Park and the Business Partnership regarding the direction of future travel particularly through the Cairngorms Brand, will in a very positive way, address the Charter principle on communications. E.g. marketing of the Cairngorms on the areas core values.

5.2 Influence on the promotional activities of others (region, enterprises, etc.) A [3] B [3] C [3]

The development and use of the Cairngorms brand, logo and use guidelines has been of significant importance to influence promotional activity of others. [A design template for CNP leaflets has been produced and CNPA encourages partners to work with this wherever possible. The Brand Management Group meets quarterly and criteria have been agreed for tourism businesses, community & tourist associations, publications, events, golf courses, outdoor operators, non-edible products and edible produce \(beef, lamb, venison, fruit & cereals only\). There have been a total of 230 applications to use the brand, including 148 businesses and 22 business or tourist associations.](#)

Planned activities to influence others, from national marketing to provision of local visitor information points is good.

5.3 Provision of clear information material on where to go and what to do when in the area (guides, maps, websites – relevant languages) A [3] B [3] C [3]

Use of the Cairngorms Brand logo on Park-wide publications, produced by a variety of organisation, illustrates the concept of promoting the Cairngorms as one whole. include:

Cairngorms Visitor Guide
Park-i (business listings publication)
What's On (events listings)
Welcome leaflet
Hill Tracks
Cairngorms Explorer (car-free days out)
Cairngorms National Nature Reserves
Place names of the Cairngorms

**5.4 Provision of accessible information centres/points for visitors and local people
A [3] B [3] C [2]**

Display panels featuring National Park information and a map or panoramic image of the National Park have been installed in 9 communities, 6 visitor attractions, 6 VICs, 5 ranger bases and 4 Park entry points, and will continue to be rolled out to key visitor sites including accommodation providers.

Grants have been given to several major projects, including a new ranger base in Angus Glens, Cairngorm Mountain Arts Projects, and Speyside Way visitor centre)

Funding was provided from CNPA and/or LEADER for over 50 events from 2005 to 2010, including Aviemore Walking & Mountain Festival, Cairngorms Food on Film Festival, Cairngorms Ceilidh Trail and the Spirit of Speyside Whisky festival.

A review of Visitor information points is planned and a commitment to maintain a wider set of information points has been made in the new plan.

5.5 Process for ensuring others (especially tourism enterprises) provide good information A [2] B [3] C [3]

Cairngorms Connections, a product knowledge course, was rolled out to frontline tourism staff through a series of training courses, familiarisation visits and an online course from 2005-2007. An interpretation framework was developed by the Park and a small grant scheme and interpretation guidance is available.

From 2011 the actions listed in the new plan are very comprehensive

5.6 Provision of guiding services and an events programme for visitors and local people, including groups and schools A [3] B [3] C [3]

An educational website, www.cairngormslearningzone.com has been set up. The two Scottish National Parks (Cairngorms and Loch Lomond) with Learning & Teaching Scotland have established a project about 'Outdoor Learning in the National Parks'.

The 13 ranger services within the Cairngorms are a mixture of public and private services and the National Park Authority provide grant-aid for 9 of the 13 Ranger services who now use the Cairngorms brand on clothing and on some vehicles. A significant new ranger base in Glen Doll has been built, and all ranger bases now have CNP-branded information. This is another positive aspect of use for the Cairngorms Brand.

The future plan encourages a more proactive approach for rangers providing information and interpretation as well as better co-ordination to create and publish a comprehensive events and activities programme.

Principle 6 – Tourism products relating to the Charter area

6.1 Provision/development of tourism offers (special events, holiday programmes, etc.) involving the discovery and interpretation of natural and cultural heritage A [3] B [3] C [3]

50 events took place between 2005 to 2010, including Aviemore Walking & Mountain Festival, Cairngorms Food on Film Festival, Cairngorm Ceilidh Trail and the Spirit of Speyside Whisky festival - events that extend the tourist season. The CBP recruited an Events & Festivals Co-ordinator and CNPA produced guidance on holding large-scale outdoor events.

An important means of discovery in the area is through walking and through the Cairngorms Core Paths (1000 km network) a range of walking opportunities at all levels is provided on well maintained and signed routes.

The new plan has a comprehensive set of actions (section 6) to promote product diversification and distinctiveness.

6.2 Effective promotion of these offers A [3] B [3] C [3]

A full review of visitor information was carried out in 2007 with stakeholder input (including questionnaires for visitors as part of student survey). This led to several recommendations for improvements to the print provision about the Park that have now been implemented. A further review will be carried out in 2011

Events, activities and availability are promoted and detailed in the Cairngorms Visitor guide, Park i and What's On publications, as well as online through www.visitcairngorms.com A Producers Directory, a local food and drink guide and a series of free Cairngorms path guides (the Cairngorms Outdoor Trust) have been produced and promote well the tourism offer and is another good practice example.

In the future plan a world class destination website is seen as essential for future marketing and an annual marketing campaign is planned alongside the coordination and promotion of a full programme of events

Principle 7 – Training

7.1 Providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the Charter area, in sustainable tourism A [0] B [0] C [0]

The CNPA say in their self evaluation questionnaire that as they do not employ front-line staff they have not undertaken or developed any training in sustainable tourism. They see themselves as an enabling organisation with no directly managed ranger service or visitor centres so they rely on working in partnership bringing people together and giving them the support they need to deliver sustainable tourism in practice. I wonder if this question is interpreted too literally as they do have core staff that do need to be aware of this work activity and to understand the principles of sustainable tourism and the approach taken in the Cairngorms.

Perhaps, in the future, they need to look at this and ensure all staff and Members of

CNPA are understanding of the approach to sustainable tourism. They have an interesting model, excellence in outcomes and this needs to be shared locally, nationally and internationally.

7.2 Providing or supporting training of other organisations and tourism enterprises in sustainable tourism A [3] B [3] C [3]

The CNPA, since 2004, has run a very successful Land Based Business Training Project (LBBT). It has two main aims, firstly to support land based businesses (i.e. any business that involves the use and/or management of land in the National Park) to grow and operate more sustainably. Secondly, to enable those businesses to contribute more effectively to the delivery of the statutory aims of the National Park.

It covers the agricultural, Forestry and Craft sectors and has trained over 1100 people per year with funding of £1 million (EU & UK) during that time. Overall the project has supported training for 3,410 people from in and around the National Park between 2004 and 2008.

It has covered training in Welcome Host, Gaelic language, natural history, etc. Also.. a range of seminars to introduce businesses to the Green Tourism Business Scheme ran between 2005 – 2008 and in 2010 and included information from the Energy Saving Trust, Community Recycling Network Scotland, and Abertay Centre for the Environment as well as Green Business UK. A Renewables and Waste Management seminar was held in 2005 and post-seminar booklet was produced. The Cairngorms Tourism Conference has been held annually, since 2005, attracting between 100 – 130 delegates each year. Cairngorms Connections, a product knowledge course, was rolled out to frontline tourism staff through a series of training courses, familiarisation visits and an online course from 2005-2007.

A skills audit was carried out with local businesses and school leavers looking at training needs and the current provision of course and trainers in and around the Park. CNPA is currently working with Skills Development Scotland on a proposed evolution of the Cairngorms LLBT Project to a more general Cairngorms Training Programme with a wider remit.

The Cairngorms Awareness and Pride (CAP) Project was piloted after identification of a market gap: to offer training for the broader community and encourages beneficiaries to learn about the Park and help deliver its aims. Both projects have been evaluated and reviewed, most recently in June 2009. The projects have both been a significant success and In the future the LBBT Project will continue and the plan lists a workable and appropriate approach, building on the past activities and developing new career options for young people as well as those seeking new employment

Principle 8 – Community involvement and maintaining local quality of life

8.1 Involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area A [3] B [3] C [2]

The CNPA is well connected to the local community through its legal and governance structures and provides support to the Association of Cairngorms Communities who

are represented on relevant forums, including the CSTF and the Brand Management Group. Also the Local Plan and Core Paths Plan consultations both started with a blank sheet of paper for community input.

In the new plan there is, importantly, opportunities for feedback from local communities on any concerns they have regarding tourism activities

8.2 Communication between the Charter area, local people and visitors

A [3] B [3] C [3]

The Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum meets up to 3 times a year. It consists of 19 members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The forum in its current form was established in early 2010, and replaces the earlier ViSIT Forum from 2005.

From 2007-2009 a range of advisory forums and delivery groups were set up aligned to the wider National Park Plan objectives. While successful in some ways, it was acknowledged that tourism issues were spread across various groups and this was leading to some stakeholder confusion. The current forum was set-up to address this. A smaller group of key delivery partners meets separately several times a year.

The Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce(CCC), Tomintoul and Glenlivet Highland Holidays, Aviemore & Cairngorms Destination Management, Deeside & Cairngorms Destination Management and Creative Cairngorms have largely merged into the Cairngorms Business Partnership and is represented on many National Park Plan delivery teams, as well as the Cairngorms Brand Management Group and the Sustainable Tourism Forum.

This illustrates very well the interconnected nature of tourism organisations across the Cairngorms and in the new plan this arrangement is continued and strengthened. This is a particular strength of the area and an approach from which other protected areas may learn. I would encourage, as I have said previously, the Cairngorms to share their experience.

8.3 Mechanisms for identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise

A [3] B [3] C [2]

Examples include. (i) The Scottish Outdoor Access Code gives the right of responsible access throughout Scotland and the CNPA is the Outdoor Access Authority for the area. (ii) Supplementary planning guidance on issues including natural heritage, water resources and sustainable design. (iii) The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Strategy and the Local Outdoor Access Forum is working well.

The new plan is strong on resource management and conservation (locally and globally) and suggests research based information which needs to be shared with local stakeholders. This open approach will help minimise potential conflicts

Principle 9 – Benefits to the local community

9.1 Promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses A [3] B [3] C [3]

The 2007 tourism conference “Making the most of local produce” and a follow-up ‘game bazaar’ with cookery demonstrations and tastings encouraged tourism businesses to offer more local game in menus. Around 40 artists and crafts people have formed an association ‘Creative Cairngorms’ to jointly promote their work. Cairngorms Farmers Market Association was formed in 2006, and markets are held every 2 weeks in locations throughout the Park, tying in to local events where possible.

Food has been identified as a key theme by tourism stakeholders and the new plan encourages this through a number of initiatives as well as strengthening opportunities to experience local, arts, crafts, drama and music.

Significant funding has just been agreed for a Cairngorms Food for Life project which will include improving supply and distribution of local produce, increasing demand and encouraging procurement of local produce, and developing food tourism. A local food guide has been produced for businesses as well as similar guide for visitors.

9.2 Encouraging the employment of local people in tourism **A [2] B [3] C [3]**

A skills audit carried out with local businesses and school leavers looked at training needs and the current provision of course and trainers in and around the Park. CNPA is working with Skills Development Scotland on a proposed evolution of the Cairngorms Land-Based Business Training Project to a more general Cairngorms Training Programme with a wider remit. A Flexible Land-based Skills vocational qualification has been developed, giving young people the skills to work in various rural sectors, including tourism, giving a seasonally flexible workforce.

The theme of helping local people to get jobs and the co-ordination of business advice, training and support services feature strongly in the new Plan. In many places the money and advice is available but not targeted or easily available. The approach set out here is one which could be easily applied elsewhere.

9.3 Development of tourism in association with traditional economic activity (e.g. agriculture) A [3] B [3] C [3]

Working with landowners who undertake traditional land management, sporting activities or with those who represent other land based activities such as skiing is a constant part of the CNPA workload. For example, the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group ran a farm tourism project in 2007 and the Land Based Training Project organised Wildlife Tourism Diversification courses for land managers and farmers.

During my visit I saw positive evidence of traditional land management accommodating new tourism activities such as bird and wildlife watching, off road cycling, water sports and holiday courses for adventure and learning.

In 2010, the Cairngorms hosted the Adventure Travel World Summit in Aviemore. Around 600 outdoor activity providers from across the world experienced some of the activities offered in the wider area, and the event has provided a significant local legacy of enthusiasm for joint working and cross-promotion in the sector.

The new plan is strong on product diversification and distinctiveness and talks about packaging holidays particularly around wildlife tourism, making more of local produce and integrating traditional sports (hunting and fishing) into the tourism offer.

Principle 10 – Managing visitor flows

10.1 Keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises A [3] B [3] C [3]

The STEAM survey has provided important visitor statistics annually since 2005. Car park counters are in place at certain key visitor sites. A park-wide visitor survey of 2500 face-to-face interviews from May 2009 – April 2010, using the 2003/04 survey as a baseline. Monitoring took place on the condition of designated sites, the number and nature of outdoor access issues and tourism numbers and distribution. Indicators have been developed at a Park Plan level. The 2006 *State of the Park* report gave baseline information and the second *State of the Park* report will be published in 2011.

The new plan stresses the importance of regular feedback and surveys, the keeping of records and undertaking research.

10.2 Creating and implementing a visitor management plan A [2] B [3] C [2]

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Strategy is in place as is the Local Outdoor Access Forum. The Core Path Plan was approved in March 2010, after extensive consultation, and shows a system of paths that will make it easier for everyone to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

However, this is not a comprehensive Visitor Management Plan and I would ask the Cairngorms to consider whether they should need a full plan incorporating a needs analysis, a strategic view and better evidence. The new tourism action plan (4b) goes some way to addressing this but perhaps, through the development of the Park Plan and using the concept idea of a sustainable destination a better visitor management plan should emerge.

10.3 Promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars A [3] B [3] C [3]

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Strategy assesses priorities for each of 6 Action Areas and a park-wide transport audit has been carried out, looking at transport links to, as well as within, the Park. The Cairngorms Explorer publication included integrated public transport timetables from 2005-2009, but this was not cost-effective and the publication has been reduced in size and now offers suggestions to enjoy the Park without a car. A demonstration project for the EU Clim-ATIC project 2008-2010 included the purchase of an electric vehicle for community & visitor use.

A wide variety of outdoor activity providers offer packages and information, about local path networks, is increasingly available through leaflets and online. A leaflet published by the CNPA 'The Cairngorms Explorer' describes travel without a car and includes illustrative walks and cycle rides utilising public transport. Discussion with bus operators has increased cycle carriage provision being encouraged & partially funded by CNPA.

A dialogue with coach operators, including possible production of coach drivers' handbook will be taken forward once guidance on Charter Part III is available.

The new plan continues the emphasis on responsible access and on popular routes

and reinforces what visitors have come to expect from a IUCN Category V protected area (conservation and quiet outdoor recreation). The new plan also encourages visitors to use greener modes of transport when in the park and in getting there.

During discussions it became apparent that there were issues around the ability to book rail travel easily and to not be able book ahead more than three months causes users not to use the rail network. An easy, integrated method of making reservations for accommodation, activities and travel should be developed. Also the rolling stock on the 'Caledonian' sleeper train was old and 'tired'. Action to upgrade and secure modern services should be a priority if the concept of a 'sustainable destination' is to be realised.

10.4 Controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development **A [3] B [3] C [3]**

CNPA is the planning authority for the National Park. Development of the first Cairngorms National Park Local Plan started in 2004 and formally adopted on 29th October 2010. A range of supplementary planning guidance includes further advice on natural heritage, water resources and sustainable design.

The new plan positively talks about guarding against damaging and intrusive development and the need to create excellent liaison between developers and planners through training sessions and mutual cross-sector engagement.

The Wider Picture – Section C of questionnaire

C1 Examples of excellence and best practice

Throughout the report there is a large number of '3' scores. This says the Cairngorms are high achievers in Sustainable Tourism within Europe's Protected Areas. Below are some highlights of excellence and best practice of note.

- Publications: Cairngorms Visitor guide, Park i and What's On as well as online through www.visitcairngorms.com A Producers Directory, a local food and drink guide and a series of free Cairngorms path guides as well as a fun publication *Sustainable Tourism for Dummies*. (6.2)
- The Cairngorms Business Partnership (1.2)
- The Cairngorms Brand and logo (1.2)
- The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (1.3.4)
- Co-ordinated Ranger Services and the Outdoor Learning & teaching work in the two Scottish National Parks (5.6)
- The Land Based Business Training Project (7.2)
- The Advisory Fora (1.3.1)

C2 Marketing and Promotion of the Charter

A key issue which has bubbled up during a number of conversations is the use and promotion of the Charter with and for businesses. The EUROPARC Charter shorthand for this is Charter Part 2 (CP2) and frequent conversations on how to best implement or develop it are common across the continent. There are some best practice examples in a number of protected areas and the Cairngorms may wish to examine these (possible study tour or expertise exchange).

With the use of The Cairngorms Brand and logo I can see some conflict or confusion could happen so some thought needs to be given on how Charter promotion and marketing develops, particularly with CP2. Recently the Brand Management Group, who have delegated powers from the CNPA board to deal with matters relating to branding discussed ways to implement CP 2 in the Cairngorms. They felt that the benefits of implementing such a scheme at this time could not justify the resources needed to set-up and promote the scheme but it should be considered again in the future, particularly if the marketing benefits of The Charter & CP2 become clearer.

C3 Experience of working with the Charter

The Cairngorms have valued working with the Charter processes and its Principles and from the early days, with a blank sheet of paper, it provided a good framework for their work. The re-evaluation has been useful but have asked whether the use of the questionnaire is the best method to showcase the progress of their work. This is something the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Working Group should, perhaps, consider. Progress they have certainly made and I wish them good luck over the next five years when, in 2016, even more models of excellence can be celebrated.

Appendix 1 – List of people interviewed during verification visit

Chris Bremner: Sustainable Economy Manager, CNPA

Jane Hope: Chief Executive, CNPA

Heather Trench: Sustainable Tourism Officer, CNPA

Pete Crane: Senior Visitor Services Officer, CNPA

Murray Fergusson: Sustainable Rural Development Director, CNPA

David Green: Convenor, CNPA

Claire Ross: Education and Inclusion Officer, CNPA

Andrew Rockall: Land Based Business Training Project Manager, CNPA

Jackie Douglas: CNPA Board Member & Chair Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum

Keith Ballam: Manager, Craggan Outdoors

Patrick Harrison: Proprietor, Beallich, Health & Activity provider

Andy Bateman: Proprietor, Mountain Innovations

Jeremy Roberts: Senior Site Manager RSPB, Abernethy National Nature Reserve

Bob Kinnaird: Principal, Glenmore Lodge, Sport Scotland

John Carnie: Project Manager, Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation

Nick Mardell: Deeside/Donside Development Manager

Bob Grant: Senior Outdoor Access Officer, CNPA

Owen Bass: Footpath contractor

Vicky Hilton: Ranger, Crown Estate, Glenlivet

Alan Rankin: Chief Executive, Cairngorms Business Partnership

Sally Dowden: Proprietor, Speyside Wildlife