

Imagine a world-class National Park

An outstanding environment in which the natural and cultural resources are cared for by the people who live there and visit; a renowned international destination with fantastic opportunities for all to enjoy its special places; an exemplar of sustainable development showing how people and place can thrive together. A National Park that makes a significant contribution to our local, regional and national identity.

This is our vision for the Cairngorms National Park in 2030.



Golden eagle



Post bus service



Canoeists, Loch Morlich

Conserving and Enhancing the Park – 25 year outcomes

2006	2030
The Cairngorms landscape is a unique and diverse mix of mountains, straths, glens, forests and farmland forming a distinct character of national importance shaped by the interaction of natural processes and people.	The distinct character of the Cairngorms landscape and its diverse mix of mountains, straths, glens, forests and farmland will be conserved and enhanced, shaped by natural processes and positive management.
The montane areas of the Park are known for the experience of wildness enjoyed by many.	The sense of wildness , particularly in the high montane areas, will be enhanced and renowned as a particular special quality of the area that continues to be enjoyed by many.
The Park has a rich biodiversity including many habitats and species of national and international importance.	The Park will continue to have a rich biodiversity which will be better connected and able to adapt to a changing climate. Areas of national and international importance will be exemplars of good management, set within a broader network of well managed habitats.
The Park contains an internationally important record of geodiversity , particularly landforms associated with glaciation, but these are under-recorded and little known beyond specialists.	The important geodiversity record in the Park will be widely recognised and will be well managed and conserved.

Conserving and Enhancing the Park – 25 year outcomes...cont

2006	2030
Active land management shapes much of the landscape of the Park and its special qualities, but is facing significant changes in policy and economic conditions.	There will continue to be an active and productive land management sector that conserves and enhances the special qualities and is a significant economic asset.
There are distinctive patterns of local architecture and design in the area's built heritage and settlements, but new development in places detracts from the pattern and character of settlements.	The built heritage of the Park will be safeguarded and new buildings will complement or enhance their setting, including the settlement pattern and character.
There are widespread archaeology and material records providing evidence of previous generations living in the area, but there are significant gaps in recording, understanding and care to conserve this heritage.	The archaeological evidence and material records of previous generations will be well recorded and understood, actively cared for and safeguarded.
There are many cultures and traditions amongst the communities of the Park, but many are at risk of being lost over time.	The cultures and traditions associated with the people and communities of the Park will be well recognised and continue to evolve as part of a living culture that secures tomorrow's cultural heritage.

Living and Working in the Park – 25 year outcomes

2006	2030
There are many active communities in the Park seeking ways to shape their own future, but current population trends challenge long-term sustainability.	There will be thriving and sustainable communities throughout the Park that are confident to share their ideas, experience and culture in actively shaping their own future and enjoying a sense of ownership of the National Park.
Training and employment opportunities are restricted to a few sectors, limiting the potential for many people in the Park to develop their skills.	There will be a wide range of opportunities for people in the National Park to develop their skills and employment options that will meet the needs of individuals and businesses.
Businesses are starting to identify opportunities associated with the National Park, but the wider value to the regional economy is yet to be realised.	The outstanding environment of the Park will stimulate economic activity, businesses will thrive , and the Park will be an economic asset to the wider regional economy.
Some business sectors, such as tourism and land management, are increasingly seeking to ensure positive impacts on the area's communities, environment and special qualities.	Delivering economic, social and environmental sustainability will be an integral part of every business. Businesses will manage their impacts to ensure a positive contribution to the area's communities, environment and special qualities.
Many, particularly young people, those on low incomes and those working in the Park, are unable to access housing that meets their needs. Housing is of variable quality and often inefficient in its use of resources.	People will be able to access housing that meets their needs through rent or purchase. Housing of all types will be of good quality and new development will implement sustainable design principles.
Transport infrastructure and provision does not fully meet the needs of residents, businesses or visitors and is heavily reliant on private car use. This constrains the development of sustainable communities and interaction with the wider regional economy.	The National Park will be a leader in sustainable rural transport . Infrastructure and provision will meet the needs of residents, businesses and visitors and strengthen the regional interaction of the Park. Barriers to transport and dependence on private car use will have reduced, helping to facilitate sustainable development.
There are significant pressures on infrastructure arising from energy, water use and waste management .	There will be a vibrant renewable energy, recycling and waste sector in the National Park together with greater awareness and action by individuals, businesses and organisations. This will result in more sustainable patterns of use, supply and management of energy, water and waste.

Enjoying and Understanding the Park – 25 year outcomes

2006	2030
The Cairngorms National Park is a new entity and people are uncertain of what it means to be a National Park, and what they can expect of it.	The Cairngorms National Park will be renowned in Scotland and internationally and will make a significant positive contribution to Scotland's national identity.
The area is already a popular tourism destination , although infrastructure, marketing and service provision are not yet co-ordinated to best effect.	The Cairngorms National Park will be an internationally recognised world class sustainable tourism destination that consistently exceeds residents' and visitors' expectations in terms of quality of environment, services and experience.
There is a good network of off-road paths and tracks to enjoy outdoor access in most areas of the Park.	There will be an excellent and integrated network of routes to enjoy outdoor access across the Park that meets the needs of residents and visitors.
There is an unusually wide and highly valued range of outdoor recreation activities available, both formal and informal.	There will be an even higher quality and increased range of outdoor recreation activities available and accessible to a wider range of people of all abilities to enjoy the Park.
The concept of responsible behaviour in terms of outdoor access is beginning to become established among those taking recreational access and those managing land.	There will be a high level of understanding and widespread practice of responsible behaviour in the Cairngorms. Outdoor access will be enjoyed and managed as an integral part of a broader recreational experience and in ways that promote enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park while conserving them.

Continued over >



Glen Avon near Tomintoul

1. VISION...cont

Enjoying and Understanding the Park – 25 year outcomes...cont

2006	2030
There is a range of interpretation locations using various media across the Park focused on specific aspects, but the sense of collective interpretation to reveal and raise understanding of the National Park and its special qualities is yet to be realised.	Interpretation of the National Park will be of an internationally high standard revealing the significance and meaning of the National Park and its special qualities, helping people to understand and enjoy the area.
Many organisations use the Park as a resource for informal and formal learning , but the potential for contributing to national learning is yet to be realised.	The Park will be a significant national learning resource that raises understanding of the special qualities of the area and sustainable development, while also contributing to national objectives.
There is a wealth of knowledge about many of the special qualities and resources of the Park from existing research and previous work. However, there are significant gaps in knowledge in some natural heritage resources and many cultural heritage and socio-economic resources.	Key gaps in knowledge will have been addressed, and the National Park will lead the way in research on issues such as sustainable development and rural tourism. Information will be widely accessible and contribute fully to the knowledge economy of the region and Scotland.



2. INTRODUCTION





2.1 Purpose of the National Park Plan

The National Park Plan brings together all those involved in managing the area to set out a shared vision, a framework for management and priorities for action. It is a plan for the National Park as a whole, not just for the National Park Authority. It has therefore been developed and will be implemented through a wide range of partners and stakeholders. These include, for example, local authorities, public agencies, land managers, businesses, communities, non-governmental organisations, voluntary groups and other interest groups. All have a significant influence in managing the National Park and will be vital to delivering the plan.

The plan sets out how the four aims of the National Park (see Section 3.1) can be achieved in a collective and co-ordinated way by all sectors and interests working together. It seeks to add value to the existing work of many bodies in the public, private, community and voluntary sectors, to achieve the vision of a world-class National Park. The plan builds on the existing work of these sectors, focusing on new action required or areas where there is an opportunity to do things differently or better by working together.

2.2 Structure of the National Park Plan

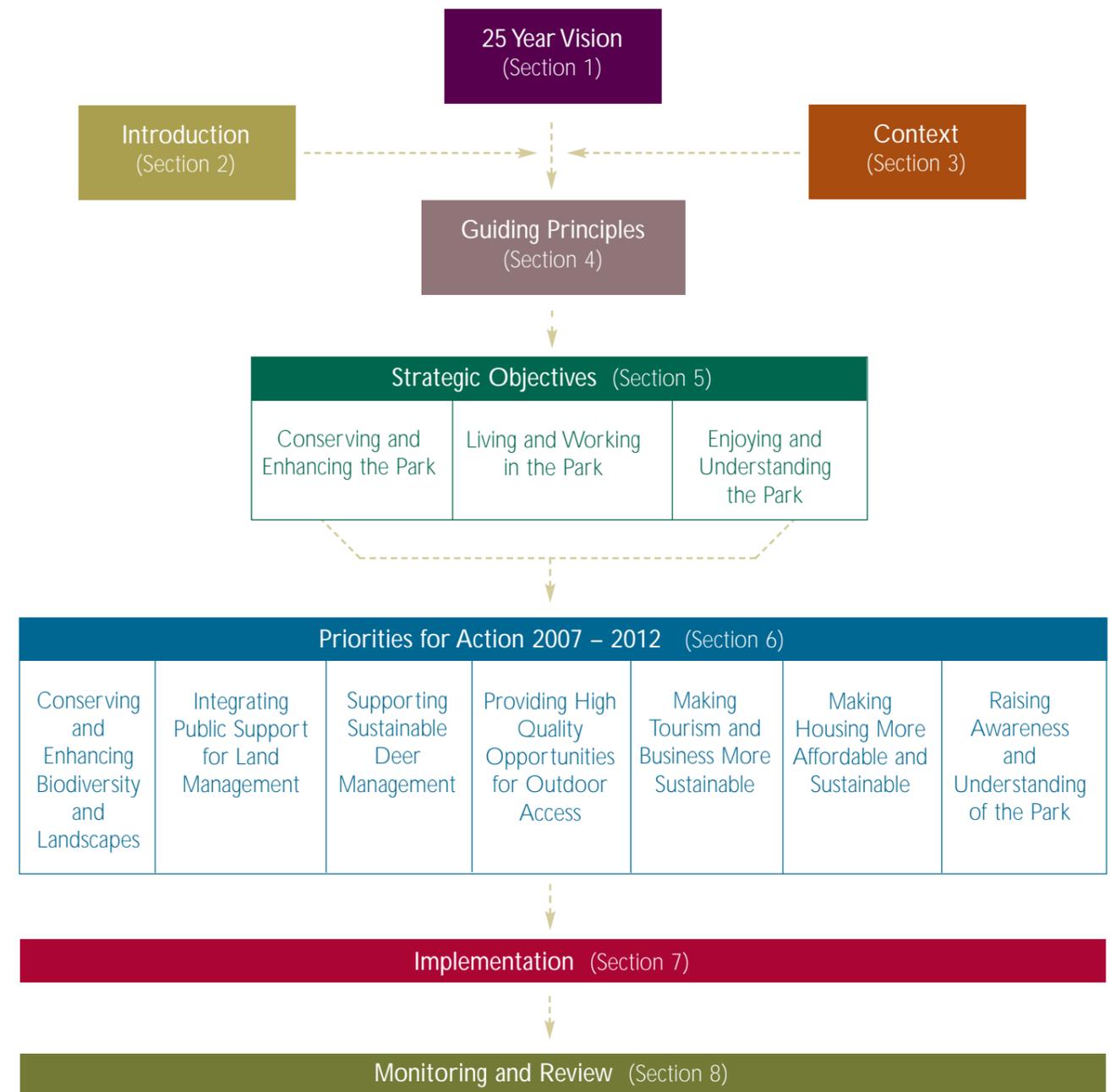
The National Park Plan is structured to be a plan for the Park as a whole and can be used by all sectors – public, private, community and voluntary

– in working towards the aims of the National Park and a shared vision for its future. The plan looks to two time horizons – the long-term (25 years) and the immediate future (5 years). Managing the resources and special qualities of the Park needs to take a long-term view, so the vision and strategic objectives of the plan look 25 years ahead. However, we also need to know where to start to achieve this vision and where to direct our efforts in the immediate future. The Priorities for Action therefore identify seven areas of focus for the period 2007-2012, through which we can collectively make a significant start on working towards the long-term vision.

The National Park Plan has a particular role to join-up the work of public bodies which, under Section 14 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, have a duty to have regard to the plan in exercising functions so far as they affect the National Park. Through closer alignment of corporate and operational objectives and priorities within the area of the National Park, the public sector can deliver better outcomes targeted at agreed priorities and be in a better position to support other sectors in delivering the objectives of the plan.

But this is a plan for the National Park as a whole, not just the National Park Authority or the public sector. It is also a plan which the private, community and voluntary sectors play a key role in both shaping and delivering. Figure 2.2 shows the structure of the National Park Plan.

Fig 2.2 Structure of the National Park Plan



The **Vision** for the National Park in 25 years time is set out at the start of this document. This is aspirational, but within reach. It identifies the end point towards which the strategic objectives and priorities of the plan are directed.

Section 2 sets out the **purpose** of the National Park Plan, its **structure**, as well as the process by which the plan has been developed and its relationship to other plans.

Section 3 then sets the context for the plan. It identifies what National Parks offer to Scotland and the **integrated approach** that is needed to deliver the aims collectively. It recognises the Park's **international, national and regional context** and describes the **special qualities** of the National Park, which are referred to throughout the plan. It also considers the **changing environment** in which we collectively manage the National Park.

Section 4 identifies five **Guiding Principles** that underpin the plan and should guide its implementation. These should be used as a checklist by everyone involved in implementing the plan, and in the broader work of all sectors in the Park. Some practical ways in which we can all live up to these principles are suggested.

The **Strategic Objectives** in **Section 5** provide the framework for managing the National Park. These are not management prescriptions, but are instead objectives to

which all sectors in the Park can actively contribute, and for which all sectors can take some responsibility. There is already a significant amount of work ongoing that is contributing to these objectives, which now provide a context for further work and a framework to guide our ongoing decisions and management.

Section 6 identifies the **Priorities for Action for 2007-2012**. These do not try to implement everything covered by the strategic objectives – to try to achieve everything in the first five years is unrealistic. They are therefore real priorities focused on specific management needs and opportunities in the next five years in which progress must be made. The priorities identify a series of **five year outcomes**, which make a significant contribution towards the longer-term strategic objectives, and a programme of actions with the key partners.

Section 7 sets out the methods of **implementation**, including some of the practical means by which the partnerships necessary to deliver the plan can come together, as well as consideration of the challenges and risks to delivery.

Section 8 sets out the framework for **monitoring and review**, in which all sectors have a role to monitor collective progress in management and wider changes to the state of the National Park.

2.3 Development of the National Park Plan

A wide range of organisations and interests has helped to develop the National Park Plan. Its role as a plan for the Park as a whole, and the need for a wide range of organisations to work towards its successful delivery, means that their involvement in shaping it from the start has been crucial.

A public consultation was held from 31st March to 30th June 2006, and a Consultation Report is available accompanying publication of the plan. This summarises the process of consultation and includes the range of views expressed during the formal public consultation and how these have been addressed in completing the plan.

Development of the plan was also informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). EC

Directive 2001/42/EC and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 require that plans of this nature are assessed to identify potentially significant environmental effects. These regulations have been superseded by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

The SEA assesses the likely significant environmental effects of the plan. It identifies opportunities to strengthen the positive environmental effects of the plan and ensures environmental considerations are integrated throughout. An SEA Statement, summarising the process and how it has informed development of the plan accompanies it and is available separately in electronic format.

Figure 2.3 summarises the process of developing the National Park Plan.



State of the Park Report 2006

The State of the Park Report 2006 (published April 2006) draws together a wide range of existing information about the Park covering:

- Natural resources;
- Cultural resources;
- Visitor and recreation resources;
- Socio-economic resources.

For each, it identifies as far as possible the current extent and state of resources, their

relative value in local, national and international contexts, and the key trends affecting them. While it provides a significant amount of information about the Park, it also highlights areas where there is little information available. This will inform a programme of research.

The State of the Park Report will be updated at five yearly intervals and will be integrated with the monitoring programme for the Park.

2.4 Relationship to Development Plans and Management

The National Park Authority shares responsibility for development planning and management with the four local authorities within the Park (Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus).

Planning applications are made to the local authorities in the first instance, but may be called-in and determined by the National Park Authority if it considers them to be of significance to the aims of the Park. The National Park Authority is responsible for preparing the Local Plan for the Park area.

The National Park Plan provides an overarching context for development planning and management within the National Park. The Local Plan will set out detailed policies to guide development in ways that contribute to the strategic objectives of the National Park Plan. The National Park Plan is a material consideration in planning authority decisions.



The Lily Loch, Rothiemurchus

2.5 Relationship to Other Plans

The National Park Plan is informed by, and in turn provides a context for, other plans affecting the National Park. The plan is set within the national policy context and where appropriate sets out how we can collectively contribute to national objectives and add value to national policy within the National Park. In Section 5, the national policy context on which this plan builds is listed at the end of each section of strategic objectives. National policy is ever-changing and will be monitored to ensure the National Park Plan continues to deliver and add value to national policy.

In turn, the plan provides a strategic context for other plans and policies affecting the National Park.

These include other plans prepared by the National Park Authority such as the Local Plan and the Core Paths Plan, but also plans prepared by other bodies – it provides a common direction and context to inform future management planning. In particular, there are common interests between the National Park Plan and Community Plans. Both seek to add value through partnerships and each is able to help deliver aspects of the other through better alignment of priorities and resources, and engagement with the private, community and voluntary sectors.

Figure 2.5 (overleaf) outlines the relationship between the different layers of plans affecting the National Park.



Cairngorm Plateau

2. INTRODUCTION...cont

Fig 2.5 Relationship to other plans



3. CONTEXT





3.1 National Parks in Scotland

One of the first Acts of the Scottish Parliament in 2000 legislated for National Parks in Scotland. There are now two National Parks: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, established in 2002 and the Cairngorms, established in 2003.

Scotland's National Parks are a distinctive model that combines conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, with sustainable use, enjoyment and development of the area's communities. Not only do National Parks seek to conserve and enhance the qualities that make these places special, they offer significant benefits to the people of Scotland. In particular, National Parks offer the following opportunities:

- **Delivering better outcomes** – National Parks, by more co-ordinated efforts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors, can deliver more integrated and sustainable results in terms of environmental, economic and social benefits.
- **Developing solutions for rural Scotland** – National Parks provide the opportunity to develop and test innovative solutions to rural issues which can be applied to benefit other areas across Scotland. National Parks are an opportunity to develop and disseminate best practice that makes a difference to people living and working in rural Scotland.

- **Providing a Park for All** – National Parks offer excellent opportunities for people of all backgrounds, interests and abilities to enjoy, learn and benefit from these special places.
- **Promoting 'The Pride of Scotland'** – National Parks represent Scotland's most iconic landscapes and reflect the natural and cultural heritage that shapes the nation's identity. They are national assets and by showing how people and place can thrive together, National Parks can make a significant contribution to Scotland's national identity.

National Park Designation and Aims

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets three conditions which an area designated as a National Park must satisfy:

- That the area is of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage, or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage;
- That the area has a distinctive character and a coherent identity;
- That designating the area as a National Park would meet the special needs of the area and would be the best means of ensuring that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the area in a co-ordinated way.

The Act also sets out four aims for National Parks in Scotland:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote sustainable use of 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.

An Integrated Approach and the Role of the National Park Authority

The four aims must be achieved collectively and in a co-ordinated way, and it is the statutory function of the National Park Authority to ensure this collective and co-ordinated approach. This makes Scotland's National Parks a new kind of National Park in the UK.

The long-term success of the National Park is dependent on this collective approach to all four aims. That is implicit in the principles of sustainable development and is the clear steer from the founding legislation for National Parks, summed up by the Minister for Transport and Environment during passage of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000:

"One of the critical elements of the aims is that they must operate together in a co-ordinated way and integrated way. We do not regard the aims as polar opposites. One of the challenges of the National Parks is to integrate these important aims."

The people, places and special qualities of the Cairngorms are already strongly connected and interdependent. The landscape, habitats and species that give the area its special character are actively shaped by land management and communities have evolved with close connections to local land-uses and landscapes. In turn, the landscape and natural environment are key attractions to visitors and form the basis of the tourism sector. Directly and indirectly, this accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy. The activities of any one sector can impact on many aspects of the Park. Its management must recognise these linkages, the mutual dependence and the opportunities that come from an integrated approach.

Achieving all four aims together therefore demands a new approach to managing the Park which draws together the wide range of public, private, community and voluntary interests. The National Park Authority is charged with leading and enabling the action and partnerships necessary to achieve all four aims together – to engender a collective sense of purpose. The Authority's role is to facilitate, co-ordinate and add value to the work of others within the Park. It is not here to duplicate work, or to assume responsibility for the work of others except where this is agreed to be appropriate for the Park. The Authority is charged with preparing the National Park Plan, one of the key ways of bringing together the partnerships needed to work towards the aims of the Park and articulate a shared vision.

The structure of the National Park Plan is designed to encourage a collective approach to the aims. For this reason, it takes an

objective-led approach across the whole Park, rather than setting out prescriptions for different management zones. In this way it seeks to establish a positive management approach for which all involved can take responsibility and which can be sustained in the long-term.

In managing this integrated approach, there will be differing views on many matters. The starting point must always be to work towards all four aims collectively, rather than to assume they are not mutually achievable. If, after taking this approach, there appears to the National Park Authority to be a “conflict” between the first aim of the Park – to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage – and the other three aims, Section 9(6) of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 requires that greater weight be given to the first aim.

This approach is consistent with the long-term sustainability of the National Park and the

ability to continue delivery of all four aims into the future. Integration between the aims is essential, but the natural and cultural resources which underpin the Park’s designation must be conserved and enhanced as a basis for the collective delivery of all four aims.

This principle has informed the development of the National Park Plan, in which the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities runs through all sections. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (see Section 2.3) is a mechanism to ensure that the likely significant environmental effects of the plan have been identified and to ensure that the strategic objectives and priorities for action are not only consistent with conserving and enhancing the special natural and cultural qualities, but that the plan takes an integrated approach designed to minimise the potential conflicts through management.

3.2 The Cairngorms National Park

In setting out our aspirations for the Cairngorms National Park to become a truly *National Park*, we must all look beyond our boundaries and consider how we interact with, contribute to and benefit from the wider world.

International Context

National Parks throughout the world vary significantly in their objectives and management. The IUCN (World Conservation Union) has classified protected areas into six categories, defined by their principal management objective. These vary from areas of strict unmanaged wilderness and scientific research to those of landscape and community interaction.

The Scottish National Parks fall within Category V, defined as:

Protected Landscape/Seascape: Protected Area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation.

‘Area of land, with coast and sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinctive character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.’

This position in the international context recognises the important links in the Cairngorms between the outstanding natural environment and the people that live in, work in and enjoy the area. It reflects the interactions of people and place that must be addressed through an integrated approach to managing the National Park. The IUCN ‘Management Guidelines for Category V Protected Areas’ identify twelve principles that should guide management of such areas, which are shown in Annex II.

The National Park plays an important part in helping Scotland and the UK deliver international obligations, for example the European Landscape Convention, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Bern Convention on Conservation of European Wildlife and Habitats.

By contrast to some international models of National Park, most of the land in the Cairngorms National Park (approximately 75 per cent) is privately owned, with a further 13 per cent being owned by the voluntary sector and only about 10 per cent being owned by state agencies. This reinforces the role of the private, voluntary and community sectors in managing the National Park.



Lochan Uaine, Pass of Ryvoan



Common darter dragonfly

National Context

The Cairngorms National Park is a special part of Scotland, and while it clearly has an importance to the local economy, environment and communities, it has an essential role in delivering national objectives, set by the Scottish Executive and its agencies.

Some of the most important and relevant national objectives which this National Park Plan helps to deliver are:

- Conserving biodiversity for the health, enjoyment and wellbeing of the people of Scotland now and in the future;
- Increasing people's quality of life through confident participation in and enjoyment of responsible outdoor access in a welcoming countryside;
- Increasing tourism revenue that is sustainable;
- Ensuring all of Scotland's people have access to good quality, warm and affordable housing;
- Managing natural resources sustainably;
- Creating a Scotland where learning for sustainable development is a core function of the formal education system; there are lifelong opportunities to learn; and the sustainable development message is clear and easily understood; and
- Recognising that what we build now has a key role to play both in conserving and extending that which is of value in our built heritage and in achieving our objectives for a sustainable future.

The national policy context in which the plan is set is listed at the end of each section of strategic objectives (Section 5), and the national strategies and objectives to which the priorities for action will contribute are set out in Section 6.

Regional Context

The Cairngorms National Park sits at a meeting point of many cultural and administrative boundaries. The National Park includes areas within four local authorities – The Highland Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Moray Council and Angus Council. Being centred on a mountain massif, communities within the National Park naturally look out to and have strong links with the surrounding areas. The transport and social links naturally tend to follow the major river systems.

The National Park therefore looks out to the four cities of Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee and Perth as well as other regional centres such as Elgin. The major transport routes into the Park link to these cities and these links play an important part in the economic and social life of people in the area. Given this central position, the Cairngorms National Park has the potential to be a significant asset to the wider region.



Frosted trees by Loch Insh



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Braemar village

Park Facts and Figures:

- The Park covers 3,800 sq km and about 5 per cent of Scotland's land area;
 - Approximately 16,000 people live in the Park;
 - Approximately 1.4 million people visit the Park each year;
 - 39 per cent of the area of the Park is designated for nature conservation;
 - 25 per cent of the area of the Park is designated as being of European importance for nature conservation;
 - The Park is home to 25 per cent of the UK's rare and threatened species;
 - Approximately 75 per cent of the land in the Park is privately owned.
- The Park includes:
- Two National Scenic Areas;
 - Extensive mountain areas including four of Scotland's five highest mountains and internationally renowned summer and winter climbing;
 - Significant stretches of two of Scotland's major rivers, the Spey and Dee;
 - Internationally important geological record and landforms;
 - Most extensive area of arctic-alpine habitat in Britain;
 - Most extensive area of Caledonian Forest in Britain;
 - 424 listed buildings;
 - 60 scheduled ancient monuments.

The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

The Cairngorms is widely recognised and valued as an outstanding environment which people enjoy in many different ways. Everyone brings their own perceptions and interests to the Cairngorms, but there are some special qualities of the area that are commonly recognised and referred to. This section does not set out to describe all the characteristics of the National Park – much of that information can be found in the State of the Park Report – but it does seek to identify some of the natural and cultural qualities that combine to give the National Park its distinctive identity.

Some of these qualities are similar to those in other areas, some are unique. Only here in the Cairngorms do they come together to create the richness and diversity recognised by its designation as a National Park.

Distinctive landscape

The combination of geology, glacial processes and subsequent climate has shaped the landscape into a unique mix of mountains, hills, glens and straths. The glacial deposits have formed the many lochs and allowed the rivers to create shingle beaches and braiding. The soils support a variety of vegetation according to richness and the prevailing climate. Onto this natural landscape people have applied complex management that has brought diversity as each generation has used the land according to its needs. The outstanding landscape of the Cairngorms is recognised as being of national importance.

Rich biodiversity

The interplay of the Park's natural resources with the typically low-intensity land management of the area has led to a rich mosaic of habitat types which, in turn, supports tremendous biodiversity. Of the UK's conservation priority species, 25 per cent are found in the Park area, and in many cases the Park supports much of their UK population. With the largest area of arctic-alpine habitat in the UK and 25 per cent of Scotland's native, semi-natural woodland, the biodiversity of the Park is recognised by numerous national and international conservation designations which cover almost 40 per cent of its area.

Mountains

Of all the features of the Park the mountains make perhaps the strongest impression, rising in steps from the floors of the surrounding straths and glens, past the foothills and Corbets (summits above 2,500 feet), to the great expansive plateau that dominates the heart of the Park. The plateau is dissected by deep and steep sided glens and corries. The climate is arctic and snow lies on the tops for much of the year. Here plants and animals survive these extremes in fragile communities unique in Britain. Here too, the visitor seeks out the wild land experience at its best.



River Dee



Lochnagar

Moorland

Moorlands cover more than half the area of the Park. They have been formed by a combination of man and nature, managed to maintain a landscape for sporting and farming pursuits – a significant part of the culture and economy of the highlands. The moors have a special ecology, a fusion of native species and land management. The red and black grouse, red deer, short-eared owl and the golden eagle all benefit from this relationship. The purple bloom of the heather moor in summer with its mountainous backdrop is for many the epitome of the highland landscape.

Forests and woodlands

The great pine forests of Deeside and Strathspey are the western-most part of the European Boreal forest. They form the largest area of ancient and semi-natural woodland in Britain. The great pine woods spread from the straths up the sides of the mountain slopes, in a few places reaching the last remaining natural tree line in Britain. The aspen woodlands of Strathspey are a remnant of those more extensive woods that were among the first colonisers after the last ice age; many of the trees are clones that are over 2000 years old.

Though they have existed for millennia the forests have always been managed – in the history of the area timber production is one of the most important economic activities, from supplying timber for Nelson's fleet, drainpipes for London or packing crates for the shells of D-Day.

Straths and farmland

The low-ground around the rivers provides the most fertile agricultural land in the area, where a farmed landscape has evolved. Dominated by grassland, with small woodlands, the farmland provides a contrast to the dominance of mountains and forests. These areas are valuable not only for their landscape character, but for the important habitats and species that the low intensity agriculture creates and supports.

Rivers and lochs

The melting snow and rainfall of the mountains drain through the many streams and waterfalls around the plateau. As the streams merge they are occasionally dammed by glacial deposits into ponds, lochans and lochs. From these flow the great rivers of the National Park – the Spey, Dee, Don and A'an. In the straths, the rivers form floodplains, shingle beaches and braided streams. With a rich biodiversity, recognised as internationally important, they also provide recreation and employment and are a key part of the cultural identity of the area.



Loch Avon

Recreation and enjoyment

The National Park offers outstanding opportunities for recreation and enjoyment. The wildness of the plateau has attracted visitors for centuries, each seeking the tranquillity, inspiration and spiritual renewal that the mountains provide. Despite the scale of the landscape, opportunities for most to experience wildness are relatively accessible. For many, the mountains, glens, forests and straths provide more active enjoyment.

There is a strong history of mountaineering and skiing in the area, valued as a centre for the skills and culture associated with these activities, as well as renowned opportunities for ski mountaineering, rock and ice climbing and off-road cycling. The rivers too are enjoyed for kayaking and fishing, and the landscape provides opportunities for many fieldsports or simply quiet enjoyment.



Highland dancers

The built environment

The history of human settlement within the Park goes back thousands of years. The legacy of this activity is scattered across the landscape, though often more evident in the higher parts of isolated glens where more recent activity has not erased signs of past activity. Around the Park the cairns, shielings and townships can be seen in and among the hills and glens.

The new settlements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were created to improve the local economy and the Park has several fine examples of planned villages in Tomintoul, Grantown-on-Spey, Ballater and Kingussie. Elsewhere, the Victorian sporting lodges and estate housing are fine examples of their kind. The traditional building materials of granite, blue whinstone, timber and corrugated metal have been used throughout the area and give strong coherency to its architecture, within which there are many local variations.

Culture and traditions

The archaeological record and Gaelic place names illuminate the history of the relationship between people and place in the Cairngorms. Place names give an insight into the culture, history and environment of the Park, which have all influenced the Gaelic names used for mountains, woodlands, lochs, rivers and settlements. The cultural heritage of the area is layered with material evidence and local traditions over time, from local Gaelic and Doric dialects and highland games, to the influence of the royal family's connection with Deeside starting with Queen Victoria's purchase of Balmoral in the 1800s. This shaped much of the landscape and culture of the area and remains part of its current identity.

3.3 Managing the Park in a Changing Environment

The special qualities and resources of the National Park are part of a dynamic environment and the result of a long history of changing natural processes, management and perceptions. The qualities that we value today are a snap-shot in time of social, economic and environmental conditions that are continually evolving.

The designation of the National Park brings a particular focus to these qualities and a special responsibility for their management, but it does not halt the processes of change and evolution. The National Park sits within a much bigger picture and changes beyond its boundary – both positive and negative – will influence how we can collectively achieve the four aims of the Park. Management and objectives will need to adapt through time in response to global, national and regional trends.

Drivers of Change

In working towards the vision for the future of the Park, we must all actively consider how best to achieve the four aims in the light of the changing context. These changes will pose risks to delivery which are likely to require management to adapt over time. To inform this process, research and forward planning is vital to improving our understanding of likely changes and implications and to maximising the opportunities for the area.

Climate change

The climate of the area has always changed through time, evidenced by the glacial landscape, but more recent evidence of climate change as a result of global human activity is apparent. The average temperature in recent decades has risen by approximately a degree; there are fewer days with air or ground frost; precipitation has

increased in spring, autumn and winter and decreased in the summer; and snow cover has declined. These changes have several impacts including more frequent and severe flooding, increased summer droughts, changes in the abundance and distribution of species and reduced snowsports. Other predicted impacts of particular relevance to the Cairngorms include the spread of ticks and further impacts on the snowsports industry.

Changes in climate will continue and will undoubtedly influence the delivery of the National Park Plan over time, influenced by the extent of global carbon emissions. In response to this, the plan includes efforts to adapt to change. These include objectives to develop stronger habitat networks and manage functioning natural floodplains, as well as mitigation efforts to reduce carbon emissions including more sustainable transport, renewable energy, sustainable building design and carbon sequestration in forestry and moorlands.



Population change

Recent projections suggest that the population in the National Park (currently approximately 16,000) is likely to increase by a small amount (approximately 600 people) during the next 10 years. The population profile is also likely to age faster than the national average, with the number of people in the 65+ age group expected to increase from 20 per cent of the population in 2004 to 27 per cent in 2016 (an increase of about 1,370 people). In the same period, the number of children in the 0-15 age group is expected to fall from around 17 per cent of the population in 2004 to 12 per cent in 2016 (a fall of about 750 children).

The greatest in-migration based on current trends is likely to be in the 40-60 age group. This group may be relatively affluent and economically active, but is less likely to bring children. It should be noted, however, that these projections are based on previous trends. The extent to which more recent in-migration of labour from overseas, particularly Eastern Europe, will impact upon future population figures is, as yet, unclear. These changes pose clear challenges to the long-term sustainability of communities. In response to this, the plan includes a series of objectives to encourage more young people to move to or remain in the area and to strengthen the economy as a basis for sustainable communities.

Economic trends

The National Park will be influenced by wider regional, national and international economic trends, which will affect the potential for business development and growth, employment opportunities, and the health of tourism and other economic sectors. They will

also influence the pattern of population changes. Recent observations indicate a shift to a higher-value knowledge-based economy; for example there is a predicted expansion of the learning, science, technology, renewable energy and tourism sectors; and a shift in employment to these from the land management sectors.

Factors such as increasing globalisation and the growing use of technology and e-commerce will also be of great significance. As well as opening local businesses up to greater competition, these trends provide tremendous opportunities for them to expand their markets. Particularly important in the context of the Park is the growth of the environmental agenda within business. There are both increasing regulatory and cost pressures to improve environmental performance, while an increasing number of consumers are considering environmental issues when making purchase decisions.

In response to these changes, the plan seeks to assist business to diversify and identify new growth opportunities and to establish a more sustainable basis in economic, environmental and social terms.



3. CONTEXT...cont

National and international policy

Many areas of policy directly affecting the National Park are heavily influenced by national and European policy decisions. For example, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the revised Rural Development Programme is likely to have a significant influence on many sectors of the Park, including and beyond land management. Changes in the direction of policy and the mechanisms through which it is implemented may create both new challenges and opportunities in working to deliver the objectives of the plan.

Building on Experience

Many of the management issues addressed in this plan are not new and this is not the first time in which people have come together to consider how best to care for and manage this special area.

For much of the twentieth century the Cairngorms area was identified as a potential National Park, although at that time, there were no National Parks in Scotland. In 1995, following the recommendations of the Cairngorms Working Party, the Cairngorms Partnership was established to bring a co-ordinated approach to managing the area. This approach succeeded

in developing effective partnerships and taking forward action in a number of important areas.

These previous initiatives have resulted in a number of strategies for the area. These include a Forest and Woodland Framework, Catchment Management Plans, work on housing, tourism and research, all of which have helped to shape this plan. Work to ensure the success of the National Park will require further development of this partnership approach.

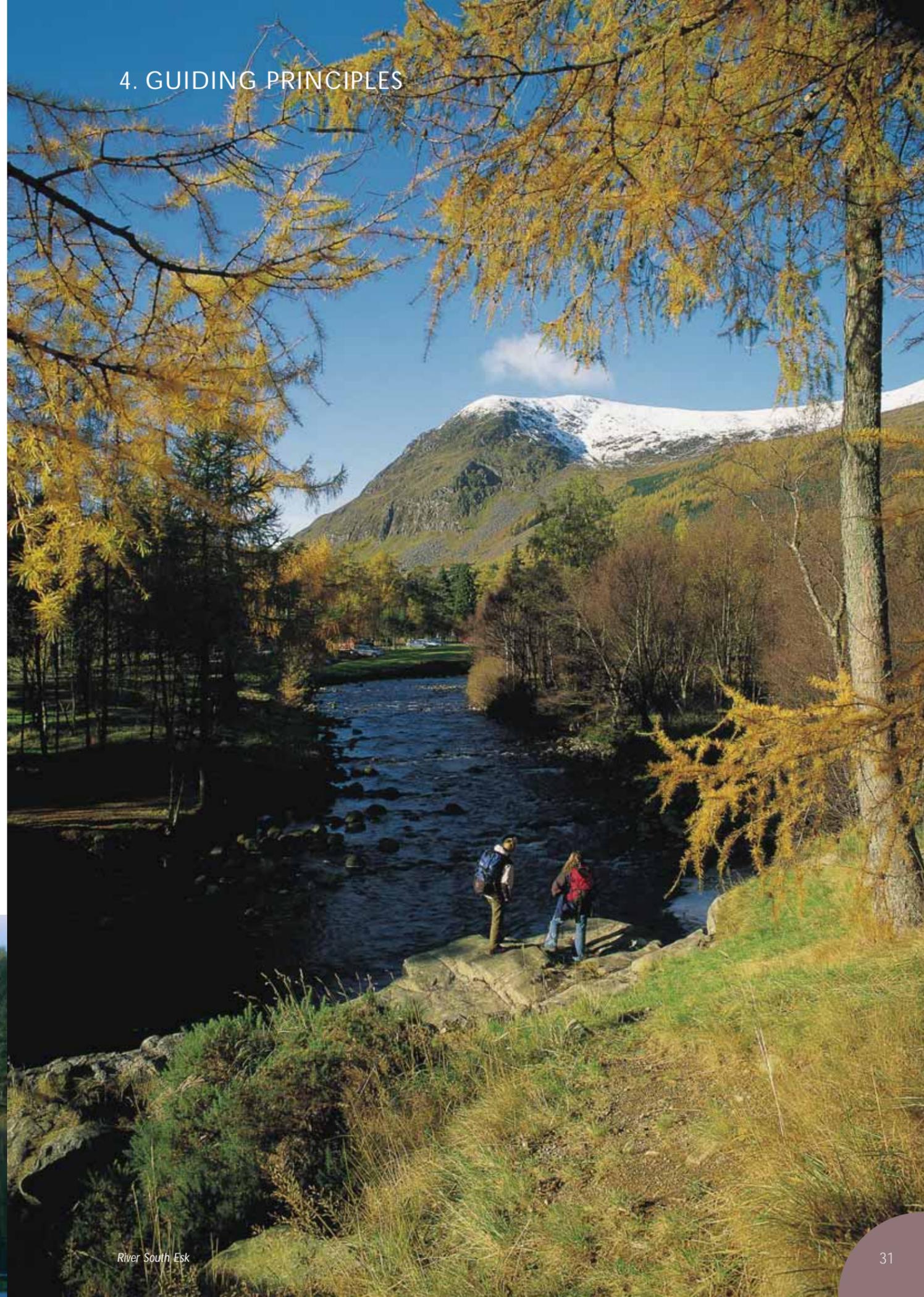
Beyond the formal partnerships, public bodies, businesses, communities, organisations and individuals have all played and continue to play, vital roles in shaping the area and seeking ways to enhance it.

This recent history provides a wealth of experience and information amongst many people in the Park and beyond. The designation of the National Park brings a fresh opportunity to build on this work and a new impetus to the collective management of the issues facing the Cairngorms area.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Loch an Eilean



River South Esk



To help meet the challenge of integration against a backdrop of continual change the following principles underpin the National Park Plan. They should guide management and decision-making in working towards all the objectives of the plan and should be used as a checklist by all involved in its implementation.

These principles are about *how* the plan is delivered, and are therefore relevant to us all. It is however, easy to state a set of principles and more of a challenge to put these into action. This section therefore includes suggestions for positive actions we can take collectively to live up to these principles.

1. Sustainable Development – A National Park for today and for the future

The National Park should be managed in a way that balances the needs of the people living, working and enjoying the Park today with the need to conserve and enhance its natural and cultural resources, to ensure they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations. This can be encouraged by:

- Identifying and measuring specific indicators that will monitor the health of the Park's natural and cultural resources;

- Using sound science and information to underpin management;
- Taking a proactive approach to mitigating human induced climate change while adapting to the effects of current change.

2. Social Justice – A National Park for All

The benefits of the National Park and its resources should be accessible to all, regardless of economic, physical or social constraints. There should be a culture of inclusiveness that seeks to create opportunities for everyone in the National Park. This can be encouraged by:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the National Park and the opportunities to get involved with groups that may be excluded, particularly young people, people with disabilities and people on low incomes;
- Working with organisations that represent the interests of socially excluded groups to gain a better understanding of their needs;
- Addressing the barriers to inclusion, such as transport, service cost and physical access constraints;
- Developing social inclusion initiatives that appeal to excluded and equalities groups and encourage their participation.

3. People Participating in the Park – A National Park for people

People within and outside the Park should be actively involved in shaping the National Park and its management, building their capacity to do so and encouraging active citizenship. This can be encouraged by:

- Operating in an open, transparent and accessible environment where people can easily find any relevant information;
- Keeping people with an interest in the Park informed of progress made against the plan and opportunities to get involved;
- Developing mechanisms which allow local communities and communities of interest to influence and engage in the decision making process and management of the Park;
- Working with young people to engage them in shaping the future of the Park;
- Supporting local communities to encourage their active involvement in the management of the Park.

4. Managing Change – A National Park open to ideas

In an ever-changing environment, the management of the National Park should be informed by the best available information to identify and effect positive change and prepare for and mitigate the potential negative consequences of change that cannot be influenced. This can be encouraged by:

- Sourcing information that can best inform the management of change and the potential consequences of various actions (for example, through scenario planning);
- Identifying potential change that will have the greatest impact on the Park and its special qualities (threats and opportunities) and preparing plans to influence positive change and minimise negative impacts;

- Sharing information and establishing mechanisms for debate and discussion to achieve the best possible solutions to manage change within the Park;
- Operating in an environment which is flexible, open and responsive to change and receptive to new ideas.

5. Adding Value – A National Park that makes a difference

The collective efforts of all sectors in managing the National Park should be focused on delivering positive and tangible outcomes for the people and places of the Park. This can be encouraged by:

- Establishing a clear understanding of the difference and benefits the plan's strategic objectives and priorities for action will achieve over the next 5-25 years and articulating how all sectors are contributing to these;
- Setting and presenting relevant work of all sectors within the context of the National Park;
- Co-ordinating our collective efforts to avoid duplication, optimise potential synergies and add value by making the most effective use of each other's knowledge, expertise and resources;
- Building trust and co-operation between different interests to establish the best way forward to achieve the Park aims;
- Learning from others at home and abroad by sharing information, knowledge and experience to establish best practice in managing a National Park;
- Piloting new initiatives to test the effectiveness of new practices in integrated and sustainable management which can benefit other areas of Scotland and beyond.