

CAIRNGORMS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Introduction: An action point from the minutes of the 16th meeting of the Forum is for me to draft a Cairngorm Local Outdoor Access Forum (CLOAF's) response to the Cairngorms Draft Core Path Plan (CCPP). Regrettably I was unable to meet the set deadline of the 30th June. My sincere apologies for this delay.

One of the objectives/functions of the CLOAF is

To advise Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on strategic access issues and the drawing up and adoption of a Core Paths Plan in terms of its responsibility under Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

This is the CLOAF's response to the final draft consultation of the CCPP.

The main requirement of the Plan is that it should be "sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout the area."

The Forum has provided advice throughout this process and on the 20th May a workshop for Forum members prior to their 16th meeting was held to help determine this response.

The CLOAF is established under Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and has a maximum of 21 members including one Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) Board member.

This membership provides a wide spectrum of geographic and subject interest across the National Park. All members expressed their appreciation of the quality work that has gone into the draft CCPP and the overall comments were positive, constructive and supportive.

The Forum believes that the Plan is Sufficient for Purpose.

However the following issues were raised

1. Upland Paths. Although members agreed that if Upland Paths were to be identified as Core Paths then they should not be treated any differently to other Core Paths in terms of management, some indicated a preference as outlined in the current Draft Plan. Proposals for identifying Paths leading from communities to Upland Paths as Core Paths but once the Path left the 'community zone' and entered the 'upland zone' it would cease to be identified as a Core Path. The Forum although not unanimous is not in favour of using safety as a criteria for selection of Upland Paths as Core.
2. Quiet Roads. There are opportunities for greater inclusion of quiet roads as Core Paths. In the absence of segregated motor/and non motorised traffic with a separate path safety is an important factor and needs to be addressed where Core Paths use quiet roads.
3. Links with Communities. The majority of members fully supported linkages between and around communities as appropriate for inclusion in the CCPP.

4. Specific areas. Members accepted that Balmoral was a special case in terms of advice received from security sources. Within this constraint members stressed the importance of public access to this area.
5. Transparency/justification. The Forum welcomed the level of transparency throughout the entire process of drafting the Plan. Since previous drafts contained detailed explanations the Forum suggest that the justifications could be reduced in the final version.
6. Resource prioritisation. The Forum signals that this is a vital factor for consideration by the CNPA. Care needs to be exercised to avoid development of a two tier system i.e. Core Paths and Non Core Paths. However resources should not be seen as a selection criteria in determining sufficiency.
7. Boundary connections. Members stressed that it is important to consider the Core Path and the CCPP in the context of the wider path network development. Core paths should not be identified, managed and promoted in isolation.
8. Future opportunities. The Core Path Planning is an entirely new concept and this draft should be seen as the beginning. The Forum is aware that this process will include future opportunities for further refinements when the CCPP is reviewed in five year's time.

Finally the Forum would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff for their assistance and co-operation throughout the period of the Forum's existence.