

Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan

Consultation and Engagement Process - Stage 1

Community Engagement & Results – **Land Managers**

Introduction

The core paths plan process targeted four main interest groups to engage with, these included; communities, land managers, people who recreate in the National Park (visitors and residents including businesses, national organisations and clubs e.g. Ramblers, Scottish Canoe Association, Cairngorm Club etc.) and visitors to the National Park (those who may not specifically come to the Park to recreate but may do so whilst they are here). The following report details how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) engaged with land managers in the Park, the people who participated in the engagement process and the feedback and results that they provided.

Engaging with Land Managers

The engagement period ran from 1st September to 30th November 2006. Questionnaires for all communities and areas in the National Park were made available on the CNPA website, through contacting the CNPA directly and at drop-in events. Land Managers were invited to their local community drop-in events, however, two workshops aimed specifically at Land Managers were also held to enable them to find out more about core paths planning and to advise the CNPA of any concerns or issues that they may have about the process.

The first workshop was held at Coylumbridge on Monday 4th September 2006 from 6:30pm to 8:30pm and the second workshop was held at the Albert Memorial Hall, Ballater on Tuesday 7th September from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. CNPA staff Murray Ferguson, Bob Grant, Fran Pothecary, Adam Streeter-Smith

and Sandra Middleton ran the events. The Coylumbridge workshop was chaired by CNPA Board member Alastair McLennan and the Ballater workshop was chaired by Local Outdoor Access Forum member Peter Ord.

Workshop Promotion

The workshops were advertised in the local press and invitations were sent out by mail and email to land managers across the Park and also to bodies such as the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, National Farmers Union Scotland, Scottish Rural Property Business Association, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group etc. Local Outdoor Access Forum and CNPA Board members were also invited.

Workshop Format

Three presentations were given providing an overview of core paths planning, the role of the Local Outdoor Access Forum and also the experiences of land managers in planning for access. The chairman then opened the floor for discussion.

Workshop Feedback

Around 25 people attended the two workshops and participants were asked to complete an evaluation sheet of the event. The feedback was generally positive and the majority of people had found out about the event via a letter or email inviting them. All indicated that the event was either useful or very useful but there was concern that the notice given had been too short. It was noted that the coffee breaks in the workshops were a very useful mechanism for networking and talking to staff.

Points raised at the Workshop

- Selecting Core Paths

It was suggested that core paths should ideally be circular routes. It was also discussed that if water bodies were to be core paths they should satisfy core path criteria.

- Funding and Maintenance

There was concern that there is no formal mechanism for capital and maintenance funding for core paths and that Land Management Contracts are cash and time limited and as such can not be used as a funding solution for maintenance. Many existing routes are not being properly used due to poor maintenance and bad design. Core path

networks will need long term resources. There needs to be greater integration between CNPA funding of core paths with the likes of funding coming from other government agencies.

- Natural Heritage

Concern was raised that core paths may have a detrimental impact on the natural heritage of the area, including disturbance of fish and capercaillie. It was noted that core paths should not affect Natura sites.

- Liability

Liability in relation to people taking access on land was a major concern for all present. The duty of care a land owner has to people on their land will still apply irrespective of whether a path is a core path or not. This caused concern in relation to maintenance arrangements, and in particular to the potential display of core paths on Ordnance Survey maps prior to that path having been brought up to a suitable standard for the general public. Liability in relation to core paths should be clarified before adopting the plan.

- Visitors

Visitors need to be encouraged to take part in the planning process.

- Behaviour

Core path designation should also address problems with litter and vandalism. In addition to designating core paths there needs to be more work done to make the public aware of their responsibilities in the code and about how farmers manage the land.

- Closing core paths for safety purposes

There is a need to clarify the situation in relation to closure of designated core paths for safety purposes relating to land management operations etc., and to bear in mind safety issues when selecting core paths. It was suggested that core paths planning could be used as a mechanism to assist land managers to guide access takers away from areas of their land where safety issues may exist.

- Rights of Way

The status of existing Rights of Way in relation to core paths was raised.

- Signage and Branding

There was some debate over the method of promotion and way-marking of core paths. There was some support for the need to develop a Scotland wide standard for way-marking core paths whilst others were concerned that this would lead to a proliferation of signage or a proliferation of branding of existing signage. Some Estates currently using their own branding on signage enjoy ancillary commercial benefits and may be averse to altering this signage should it be required.

Reflections

The workshops provided a useful discussion forum for informing land managers about core paths planning but also to gather their views and comments on the core paths planning process. A number of land managers have come along to community meetings and got involved and have been interested in seeing what the communities have to say. Many land managers have indicated that they will be more interested in getting involved at the 'lines on maps' stage.

Next Steps

The issues raised and the information gathered throughout the process will be used to inform the development of selection criteria for core paths. The selection criteria will then be used to select core paths for the Cairngorms National Park. The selection criteria and maps of the selected paths will be drawn up into an Interim Draft Core Paths Plan which will be completed by the end of March 2007. This Plan will then be made available for the public to make comment.

Cairngorms National Park Authority

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