

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

# Environmental Report Draft

Core Paths Plan **Draft**  
Strategic Environmental Assessment



# Environmental Report on the Core Paths Plan **Draft**

## How to Comment

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report is published alongside the Draft Core Paths Plan for use during a public consultation period which runs for three months to 30 June 2008. The Report assesses the potential environmental effects that the Draft Core Paths Plan may have on the environment.

Comments on the Environmental Report and Draft Core Paths Plan are requested at any time before 30 June 2008. A form for commenting on the Draft Core Paths Plan can be found inside the front cover of that document. There is no comment form for this Environmental Report, any comments you may have on the report should be sent to:

**Cairngorms National Park Authority**  
**FREEPOST NAT 21454**  
**GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY**  
**PH26 3BR**

**Please note that all responses will be made public.**

The Draft Core Paths Plan and this Environmental Report are available to view at the Cairngorms National Park Authority offices at:

14 The Square	Albert Memorial Hall
Grantown-on-Spey	Station Square
Moray	Ballater
PH26 3HG	Aberdeenshire AB35 5QB

Tel: 01479 873535

Fax: 01479 873527

Email: [corepathsplan@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:corepathsplan@cairngorms.co.uk)

They can also be viewed at a number of local libraries and post offices within the Park. Alternatively the consultation documents can be downloaded from the Cairngorms National Park Authority website:

**[www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths)**

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

COVER PHOTOS: CNPA, David Gowans, Paul Tomkins/VisitScotland/Scottish Viewpoint, Upper Deeside Access Trust

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#### **Use of Ordnance Survey Mapping**

This Environmental Report is illustrated with maps to clearly show the geographic location of features relevant for the purposes of consultation. This document contains mapping data which is the property of Ordnance Survey and any unlawful use or copying other than for the purpose of viewing and printing is prohibited. The document is for reference purposes only. No further copies may be made. The representation of features or boundaries in which Cairngorms National Park Authority or others have an interest does not necessarily imply their true positions. For further information please contact the appropriate authority.

# 1. Non-technical Summary

- 1.1** This is a non-technical summary of the Environmental Report, part of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on the Draft Core Paths Plan. It can be read on its own or as part of the full SEA Environmental Report. It explains:
- What the SEA is;
  - Why it has been done; and
  - What effects the Draft Core Paths Plan is likely to have on the environment.
- 1.2** Strategic Environmental Assessment, or SEA for short, is a way of making sure that environmental implications are carefully considered when a plan or strategy is developed. It is a formal part of the Core Paths Planning process that is a legal obligation. It is required by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. This Act implements a European Directive that requires SEA to be carried out on certain kinds of plans and programmes.
- 1.3** The idea behind SEA is that by making sure that environmental features such as plants and animals, air quality, human health or historic remains are considered as the Plan is made, then it is less likely that the Plan will harm them. SEA helps to make sure that environmental considerations are taken into account by the Plan in two main ways.
- 1.4** Firstly, the SEA predicts what effects the Plan is likely to have on the environment and whether they are considered significant. Secondly, if the SEA does predict 'significant' effects, the Plan should be changed to introduce measures that will make the effects less harmful or serious. Equally, the SEA should highlight opportunities to strengthen the positive environmental effects of the Plan. The end result should be a Plan that is unlikely to lead to significant harm to the environment, and should maximise the positive benefits to the environment.
- 1.5** The SEA process is also about making public the information used to predict the effects of the Plan on the environment, and how they were predicted. The public have an opportunity to comment on the SEA process at this stage, through publication of the 'Environmental Report', which accompanies publication of the Draft Core Paths Plan.

## Summary of the SEA process

- 1.6** The SEA process can be broken down to a set of stages that happen as the Draft Core Paths Plan is being prepared. These stages are displayed in Figure 1.1 below.

### Figure 1.1- SEA Process Summary

- i. Describe the current condition of the environment in the area and how it is changing or has changed. Predict what the environment would be like in the future without the Plan being made;
- ii. Consider how different approaches to the Plan could have different environmental effects;
- iii. Predict what effects the Draft Core Paths Plan would have on the environment;
- iv. Decide on ways of reducing any harmful effects and increasing any positive effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan on the environment and change the Draft Core Paths Plan accordingly;
- v. Publish the Draft Core Paths Plan and an SEA Environmental Report that explains what the SEA is and how it has been done so that people can comment on them;
- vi. Take note of the comments on the Environmental Report and revise the Core Paths Plan or SEA accordingly and do any extra assessment that is required as a result;
- vii. Publish the Core Paths Plan and write a formal statement of how the SEA has been carried out with the Draft Core Paths Plan, and how it has affected the Core Paths Plan; and
- viii. Keep measuring what effects the Core Paths Plan actually has on the environment as it is implemented, so that changes can be made in future if they are needed, and so that it is possible to predict effects more accurately in the future.

## Summary of the likely significant effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan

- 1.7** An aim and objectives have been established for the Draft Core Paths Plan to assist in the identification of a network of core paths. The aim and objectives have evolved through public engagement but have also been influenced and guided by the four aims of the National Park as interpreted by the Cairngorms National Park Plan<sup>1</sup> and the Outdoor Access Strategy<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.8** The aim and objectives, along with public consultation, have been used to identify core paths on an area by area basis based on the Action Areas identified within the Outdoor Access Strategy. The resultant 'area networks' and the aim and objectives themselves have all been assessed for their likely effects on the environment. The assessment has shown that the aim, objectives and area networks are likely to have a strongly positive effect on the environment. This is largely due to the way in which the Draft Core Paths Plan has been developed taking into account the policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Cairngorms National Park Plan.

## The differences SEA has made to the Draft Core Paths Plan

- 1.9** As a result of assessment, a number of modifications to the area network proposals have been identified. This has included some realignment of routes or complete removal of routes where no mitigation or alternative could be found.

## Next steps

- 1.10** After consultation on the Draft Core Paths Plan together with the Environmental Report, any appropriate changes will be made and the final Core Paths Plan will be prepared. Changes to the Core Paths Plan will be assessed for their likely environmental effects. This assessment will be reported in an updated version of the Environmental Report that will accompany publication of the final Core Paths Plan.

<sup>1</sup> Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007, (CNPA 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Enjoying the Cairngorms: Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012 (CNPA 2007), is available on the CNPA website or on request.



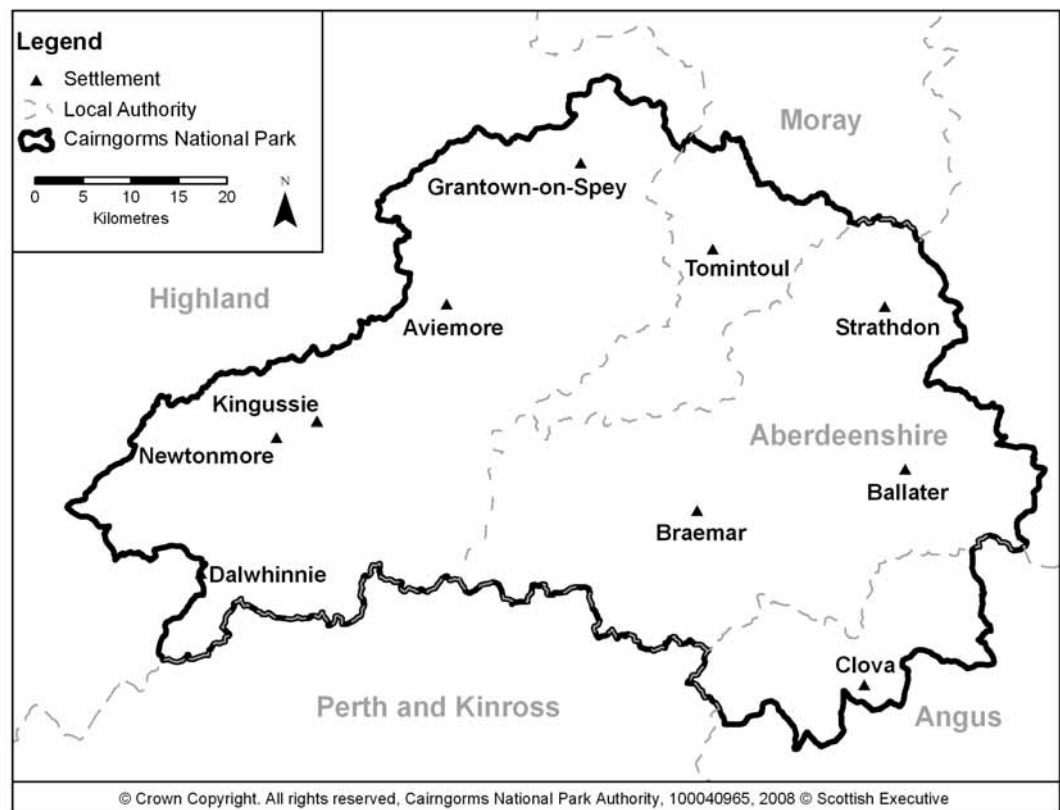
## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This is an Environmental Report for the Cairngorms National Park Draft Core Paths Plan in terms of the European Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Draft Core Paths Plan, and this version of the Environmental Report accompanies the Draft Core Paths Plan.
- 2.2 The Environmental Report describes the SEA process that has accompanied the development of the Draft Core Paths Plan so far. It follows a determination by the Cairngorms National Park Authority on the 21 June 2006 that an SEA of the Draft Core Paths Plan would be required, and a scoping exercise to identify a methodology for assessment and likely significant effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan. A Scoping Report was sent to the Consultation Authorities on 25 July 2006 and their comments, which have informed the assessment methodology and process, were received on 29 August 2006. A further amendment to the methodology was agreed by the Consultation Authorities on 23 March 2007.
- 2.3 An Interim Draft Core Paths Plan was consulted on from April to June 2007. The comments received on this interim draft helped refine the aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan and to inform the development of the SEA.

## The Cairngorms National Park

- 2.4 Map 2.1 shows the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park. It extends to 1,467 square miles (3,800 sq km) and covers part of four local authority areas - Aberdeenshire, Angus, Moray and Highland. At the heart of the Park is the central massif of the Cairngorm Mountains, but it also encompasses many of the settlements around the mountains, including Granttown-on-Spey, Aviemore, Tomintoul, Strathdon, Braemar, Ballater, Clova, Dalwhinnie, Kingussie and Newtonmore.

Map 2.1 - Cairngorms National Park



## The National Park Designation

- 2.5** The Cairngorms National Park was established in September 2003, the second National Park in Scotland following the earlier designation of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. It was established under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, which also required a new National Park Authority to co-ordinate management of the Park.
- 2.6** The National Park was established on the basis of:
- The outstanding national importance of its natural and cultural heritage;
  - The area's distinctive character and coherent identity; and
  - The special management needs of the area.
- 2.7** The aims of the National Park are:
- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage;
  - To promote sustainable use of the natural resources;
  - To promote understanding and enjoyment (including in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and
  - To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

## The National Park Authority

- 2.8** The National Park Authority is a Non-Departmental Public Body and has a board of 25 members of which 20 are appointed by Scottish Ministers (ten being nominated by the four Local Authorities) and five being elected by residents of the National Park.
- 2.9** The general purpose of the National Park Authority set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 is to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-coordinated way. The Park Authority is an enabling organisation that works with and through other bodies to bring added value to the management of the Park therefore achieving the Park aims.
- 2.10** The National Park Authority must ensure that the four aims are achieved collectively. However, if there appears to be conflict between the first aim and any other aims then greater weight must be given to the first aim (National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, Section 9 (6)).

## The Cairngorms National Park and the Planning System

**2.11** Unlike a local authority, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is not a full planning authority, but shares planning powers in the Park area with the four existing local authorities. The Park Authority is responsible for preparing and publishing a Local Plan for the whole Park area. The CNPA only operates a development management function on those applications considered to be of significance in relation to the aims of the Cairngorms National Park.

## The Cairngorms National Park Authority as an Access Authority

**2.12** The CNPA is the Access Authority as defined in Section 32 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, it has four statutory duties under this act, these are:

- Uphold the access right;
- Prepare a Core Paths Plan;
- Establish an Outdoor Access Forum;
- Publicise the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In fulfilling this function the CNPA has a number of powers at its disposal to achieve the above duties.

### 3. The Purpose of the SEA and Draft Core Paths Plan Context

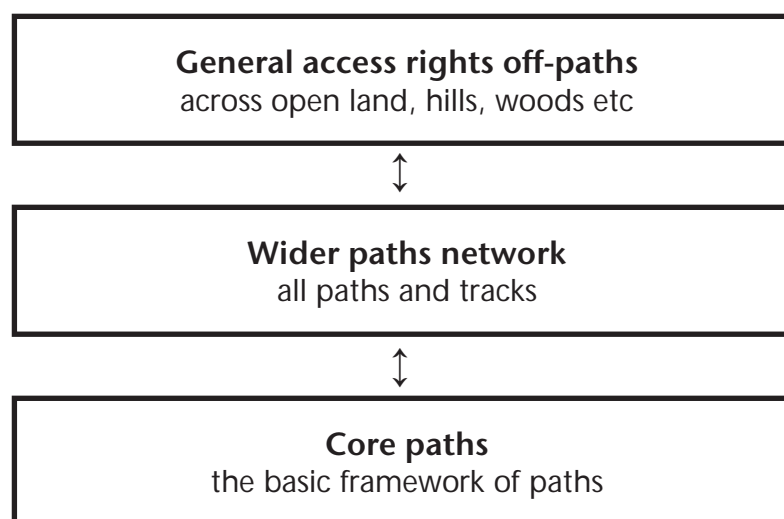
#### The Purpose of the SEA

- 3.1** The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) that is described in this report is an assessment of the effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan on the environment under the terms of European Directive 2001/42/EC.
  
- 3.2** Article 1 of the Directive states that its objective is:  
'to provide for a high level protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant environmental effects on the environment.'
  
- 3.3** The SEA should simply provide a more systematic and transparent method for considering issues that would normally be considered in the plan making process. It should also support the delivery of the four aims of the Cairngorms National Park.

## The Cairngorms National Park Authority Core Paths Plan

- 3.4** The network of core paths will provide the basic framework of paths that give people access throughout the Cairngorms National Park. These paths will satisfy the needs of both visitors and residents for getting about and will link into a much wider path network. To achieve this, the development of the core paths network is likely to comprise a mixture of existing paths and some new paths, which together will provide a coherent network. It is important to note that core paths are not intended to limit people's access rights but to complement them. Access rights can be thought of as operating across three overlapping levels as shown in the Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1 – Core Paths and Wider Access**



### Objectives of the Core Paths Plan

- 3.5** The Core Paths Plan is intended, through securing access rights and identifying key paths for development, to deliver the aims of the Cairngorms National Park. It is also an important delivery tool of the Park Plan.

### The Structure of the Core Paths Plan

- 3.6** The Core Paths Plan comprises an aim and objectives to steer the designation of paths that best fit with the aims of the Cairngorms National Park, and a series of maps illustrating those paths that have been designated. The contents of the Draft Core Paths Plan are shown in Figure 3.2 on the following page.

## Figure 3.2 – Contents of the Draft Core Paths Plan

### Form for supporting or objecting to the Draft Core Paths Plan

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. Developing the Core Paths Plan

The Process

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Natura

#### 3. Selecting the Core Paths Network

Aim

Objectives

#### 4. Have Your Say

#### 5. Frequently Asked Questions

#### 6. The Proposed Core Paths Network

Overview

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Map 6 – Braemar

Map 7 – Crathie

Map 8 – Glen Tanar

Map 9 – Ballater

Map 10 – Dinnet and Cambus O'May

Map 11 – Upper Donside

Map 12 – Strathdon

Map 13 – Glenlivet and Tomintoul

Map 14 – Tomintoul

Map 15 – Drumin and Tomnavoulin

Map 16 – Lower Badenoch and Strathspey

Map 17 – Grantown-on-Spey and Cromdale

Map 18 – Dulnain Bridge and Nethy Bridge

Map 19 – Carr-Bridge

Map 20 – Boat of Garten

Map 21 – Aviemore

Map 22 – Kincaig and Insh

Map 23 – Kingussie

Map 24 – Upper Badenoch and Strathspey

Map 25 – Newtonmore

Map 26 – Laggan

Map 27 – Dalwhinnie

Map 28 – Glenmore and Rothiemurchus

#### 7. Next Steps

#### Annex 1 – List of Proposed Core Paths

## Links to other plans and programmes

- 3.7** There are three key plans and strategies that have had an influence on the Draft Core Paths Plan both in terms of content and in terms of shaping both the objectives and the proposed paths. The plans and strategy are listed in Annex 1 of this report.

## Cairngorms National Park Plan

- 3.8** The Cairngorms National Park Plan was approved by the Minister on 15 March 2007. The purpose of the Park Plan is to ensure that the Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way. The Park Plan covers all sectors relevant to the aims of the Park and provides the strategic context for all working within the Park. It is a long term plan with a vision for 25 years and has strategic objectives for all in the Park to work towards. In addition to this vision, it has a suite of priorities for action for the first five years of the Plan. Delivering high quality opportunities for outdoor access is one of these priorities for action and the Core Paths Plan is one of the key delivery mechanisms. The Park Plan was also subject to a SEA.

## Enjoying the Cairngorms - Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012

- 3.9** This is the first time a strategy for outdoor access has been prepared for the Cairngorms area. It has been developed in conjunction with the Park Plan to ensure there is a consistent and Park-wide approach to the delivery and future management of non-motorised outdoor access. It will also develop the legal requirements for recreation and outdoor access under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The Outdoor Access Strategy comprises seven sections, covering Action Themes and Policies, Action Mechanisms, Action Areas and a Park-wide Action Plan. These policies and proposals will guide the development of outdoor access in the Park. The Strategy is a key implementation strategy for the Cairngorms National Park Plan. The Outdoor Access Strategy along with the Park Plan provides the strategic context for the Core Paths Plan. The Outdoor Access Strategy was also subject to a SEA.



## The Local Plan

**3.10** The Local Plan for the Cairngorms National Park will replace the four existing Local Plans within the Park boundary that have been prepared by the constituent local authorities. The Plan will form one part of the Development Plan for the Park, with the local authorities Structure Plans providing the other part of the Development Plan. The Local Plan comprises policies and proposals to guide development in the Cairngorms National Park area. These are based on the strategy for development outlined through the Park Plan. The Core Paths Plan will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Local Plan is also subject to a SEA.

## Other plans and policies

**3.11** Other plans and policies have had an indirect influence on the Draft Core Paths Plan through influencing the Cairngorms National Park Plan and the Outdoor Access Strategy.

## 4. Methodology

### The Cairngorms National Park Authority's approach to SEA

- 4.1** The Park Authority's approach to carrying out the SEA is based on the Scottish Executive guidance<sup>3</sup> and the desire to integrate the SEA process closely with the development of the Draft Core Paths Plan itself. The aims and objectives of the Park include explicit reference to a wide range of environmental topics. The procedure which is formalised through SEA is therefore central to the process of developing the Draft Core Paths Plan.
- 4.2** The Park Authority chose to carry out SEA of the Draft Core Paths Plan internally rather than employ consultants to carry out the work as a contract. Previous experience of SEA with the Cairngorms National Park Plan, Local Plan and Outdoor Access Strategy has shown that by doing the SEA 'in-house', it could be better integrated with the development of the Core Paths Plan and would therefore lead to an improved Plan.
- 4.3** The SEA process reflects the development of the Draft Core Paths Plan itself and can be divided into a number of different but overlapping stages. These stages are shown in Figure 4.1 below. Each of these stages is then considered in more detail.

**Figure 4.1 - The SEA Process**

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

<sup>3</sup> Strategic Environmental Assessment Tool Kit (Scottish Executive, 2006).

## SEA screening

- 4.4** An initial screening consultation was issued to the consultation authorities, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Historic Scotland both judged that the Draft Core Paths Plan could have significant environmental effects. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) considered that in respect of its main areas of interest – air, water, soil, human health and climatic factors – the Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects. The Cairngorms National Park Authority determined that the Draft Core Paths Plan should be subject to SEA on 21 June 2006.

## Environmental baseline

- 4.5** The collation of information to form the environmental baseline for the SEA was aided by the production of the State of the Park Report<sup>4</sup>, part of the process of preparing the Cairngorms National Park Plan. The report draws together existing information on the Park's resources and special qualities as a baseline to inform development and assessment of the Park Plan and future plans and policies in the Cairngorms National Park area. The State of the Park Report comprises four sections:

- Natural resources;
- Cultural resources;
- Visitor resources;
- Economic and social resources.

- 4.6** In each section the report identifies as far as possible:

- Current extent of the resource;
- Relative importance of the resource;
- Current state of the resource;
- Key trends affecting the resource;
- Limitations on existing data and information gaps.

- 4.7** The report provided much of the environmental baseline data against which the potential effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan can be assessed, and against which implementation of the Core Paths Plan can be monitored.

## SEA scoping

- 4.8** Following the determination to carry out SEA, the Park Authority sent an SEA Scoping Report to the Consultation Authorities on 25 July 2006. It set out what the potential effects of the Core Paths Plan could be, and proposed a methodology for assessment, including the SEA objectives that would be used for assessment. The Consultation Authorities provided the Cairngorms National Park Authority with their responses on 29 August 2006.

<sup>4</sup> State of the Park Report 2006, Cairngorms National Park (CNPA 2006).

## Developing environmental objectives and criteria

**4.9** The SEA scoping report set out an environmental baseline together with SEA objectives and criteria for assessment of the Draft Core Paths Plan. These were modified following receipt of the Consultation Authorities' comments on the Scoping Report and are described in Section 6 (see page 35) of this Environmental Report. The objectives and criteria were further refined during the assessment.

## Assessing the Draft Core Paths Plan

**4.10** The strategic context for the Draft Core Paths Plan and in particular the strategic objectives for it, are provided by the Cairngorms National Park Plan and Outdoor Access Strategy which have also been subject to SEA. An aim and objectives have been identified for the Draft Core Paths Plan to assist in the identification of a network of core paths. The aim and objectives have evolved through public engagement but have also been influenced and guided by the four aims of the Park as interpreted by the Park Plan<sup>5</sup> and the Outdoor Access Strategy<sup>6</sup>.

**4.11** The aim and objectives along with public consultation have been used to identify core paths on an area by area basis based on the Action Areas identified within the Outdoor Access Strategy<sup>7</sup>. In order to predict the likely environmental effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan, the aim and objectives and the proposed area networks will be evaluated against the SEA objectives. The aim and objectives and the Area Networks are assessed against each of the SEA objectives and given a score and reasoning for that score. In order to make the scoring simple to understand and to analyse, a system of five categories of effect is used for the assessment. These run from strongly positive effects through to strongly negative effects and are shown in figure 4.2 below with symbol codes.

<b>Figure 4.2 – Environmental effect scoring</b>	
<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Description of effect</b>
++	strongly positive effect
+	positive effect
=	neutral or no effect
-	negative effect
--	strongly negative effect
?	uncertain effect/effect cannot be predicted
/	not applicable

<sup>5</sup> Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007, (CNPA 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Enjoying the Cairngorms: Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012, (CNPA 2007).

<sup>7</sup> To note, the original Scoping Report proposed assessment of each network on the basis of Community Council areas but this was changed to Action Areas to align the assessment better with the Outdoor Access Strategy.

**4.12** The nature and scale of the effects identified for the aim and objectives and each of the Area Networks are recorded in detail in assessment sheets like the one in Figure 4.3 below. This sheet shows the score given for each SEA objective and the reasoning for that score.

<b>Figure 4.3 – Example of SEA Assessment Sheet</b>		
<b>Aim and Objectives/ Area Network</b>	The aim and objectives or area network name.	
<b>Purpose of the Aim and Objectives/Area Network</b>	What the aim and objectives or area network are supposed to achieve and how.	
<b>Identify Aim and Objectives/Area Network Options, including consideration of alternatives where relevant</b>	Detail of what options were considered in developing the aim and objectives or area network, what alternatives (if any were possible) were considered and decisions taken so far.	
<b>Prediction of Direct and Indirect Effects:</b> Detailed assessment of the aim and objectives or area network against each SEA objective and reason behind predictions.		
<b>SEA Objectives</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Reasoning for Score</b>
1	eg ++	
2		
etc		
<b>Summary of Aim and Objectives or Area Network Effects</b>	A brief summary of the effects of the aim and objectives or area network based on the detailed assessment.	
<b>Options for Mitigation or Modification</b>	Amendments to strengthen the positive effects or mitigate the negative effects of the aim and objectives or area network.	

**4.13** The scores given for each area network for each of the SEA objectives are then compiled into a 'matrix' of scores. The matrix is then used to summarise the overall effects. It can also be used to help identify trends in the effects and to help identify cumulative effects. An example of the assessment matrix is shown in figure 4.4 on the following page.

Figure 4.4 – SEA Area Network Assessment Matrix								
Draft Core Paths Plan Area Network	SEA Objectives							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8, 9, 10 etc...
Central Cairngorms								
Eastern Cairngorms								
Upper Deeside								
etc								
Possible Cumulative Effects								
The possible cumulative effects are calculated on the basis of 2 points for each ++, 1 point for each + score, 0 points for each = or ? or /, less 1 point for each – and less 2 points for each - -								

## The Environmental Report

**4.14** This Environmental Report provides a summary of the SEA process to accompany the Consultative Draft Core Paths Plan, and provides the information required of an Environmental Report as set out in Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

## Modifying the Core Paths Plan and revising the Environmental Report

**4.15** Both the Draft Core Paths Plan and the Environmental Report are subject to consultation. The SEA and Draft Core Paths Plan may change as a result of comments on the Environmental Report or Draft Core Paths Plan. An SEA consultation report will be prepared by the Cairngorms National Park Authority to collate comments on the SEA. A Draft Core Paths Plan consultation report will also collate comments on the Draft Core Paths Plan.

**4.16** The adopted Core Paths Plan will be accompanied by a revised Environmental Report that takes into account comments on this Report and any changes to the Core Paths Plan.

## Finalising monitoring proposals

**4.17** Proposals for monitoring the significant environmental effects will be finalised once informed by the responses to the Draft Core Paths Plan and the Environmental Report.

## Statement of compliance and environmental considerations

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

## Monitoring significant environmental effects of the Plan to inform review

**4.19** This stage of the SEA process will be carried out as part of the ongoing monitoring and review of the Core Paths Plan. It is anticipated that monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the Plan will be supplemented by more strategic monitoring of the state of the Park against health indicators (many linked to the state of the environment) that are identified through the Cairngorms National Park Plan process.

## Consultation in the SEA process

**4.20** This Environmental Report is subject to consultation with the Draft Core Paths Plan. It is hoped that the Consultation Authorities and public will provide comments on the likely significant environmental effects of the Draft Core Paths Plan as well as on the Environmental Report itself.

**4.21** The SEA process has involved two formal stages of consultation so far. The Consultation Authorities have been asked firstly for screening opinions and secondly for scoping opinions.

## Difficulties encountered in the SEA process

**4.22** The SEA process is intended to improve the plan-making process and to provide the public as well as the plan-makers with clear information about likely environmental effects of the plan. At this early stage of the plan-making process, a number of factors have created difficulties or uncertainties that have affected both the consultative Draft Core Paths Plan and the SEA.

## Information gathering and availability

**4.23** Both the Draft Core Paths Plan and SEA require information that is as accurate and up to date as possible. The State of the Park Report, compiled to assist the development of the Park Plan, has gathered together a wide range of current information on the environmental resources of the Park, but also identifies limitations to this information.

- 4.24** The new geography of the Park boundary means that data sets cannot be interrogated or analysed at the Park level, because they have been collated for different boundaries. For example, a significant amount of data is collated at the local authority level, which therefore requires extraction from four different sources, which do not match the Park boundary. This can be compounded by the fact that data is often held in different formats. This is an issue that will be addressed over time as the Park Authority identifies research priorities and carries out monitoring that will give an increasing knowledge base.
- 4.25** There is a lack of baseline information on levels of use of the Park by different recreational groups at a Park-wide level and also the levels of demand for different recreational uses.

### Difficulties encountered in the assessment

- 4.26** The SEA objectives for the Draft Core Paths Plan are the same as those for the SEAs carried out for both the Park Plan, Local Plan and Outdoor Access Strategy. In identifying SEA objectives and criteria, there was difficulty in identifying the appropriate aspects of human health and population to consider in assessment. Schedule 3 of the Act<sup>8</sup> identifies both of these topics as suitable for inclusion. However, it proved difficult to separate the environmental effects of these two topics from the socio-economic effects that might be considered in a broader and separate sustainability appraisal.
- 4.27** These topics have been combined into one SEA objective 11 'to maintain a sustainable and healthy population'. The criteria used for assessment relate to effects on human health and wellbeing, which are considered to include access to key services. The criteria used for this Environmental Report are:
- Ensure non-car access to services for communities;
  - Ensure access to recreation opportunities;
  - Encourage communities and visitors to be more active.

### Natura Sites

- 4.28** The Draft Core Paths Plan is subject to the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. This means that the Park Authority will not be able to adopt the Plan if an appropriate assessment has not been carried out in respect of the provisions of the Plan in line with Articles 6.3 and 6.4 of the Habitats Directive. SNH have provided advice to the CNPA and an Assessment of the Draft Core Paths Plan has been done. The Appropriate Assessment is integral to the SEA process and has informed the development of the Draft Core Paths Plan.

<sup>8</sup> Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.



## 5. Environmental Baseline and Issues

### Environmental baseline of the Cairngorms National Park

- 5.1** The current environmental conditions form the baseline for considering potential impacts. In the absence of change, the current trends are considered likely to continue. This section of the Environmental Report describes the current environmental baseline and trends that are considered relevant to the Cairngorms National Park and Draft Core Paths Plan.
- 5.2** Figure 5.1 below summarises the key environmental baseline facts. Maps 5.1 to 5.6 provide an overview of the distribution of a range of environmental features in the National Park. Detailed data is available in the State of the Park Report<sup>9</sup>.

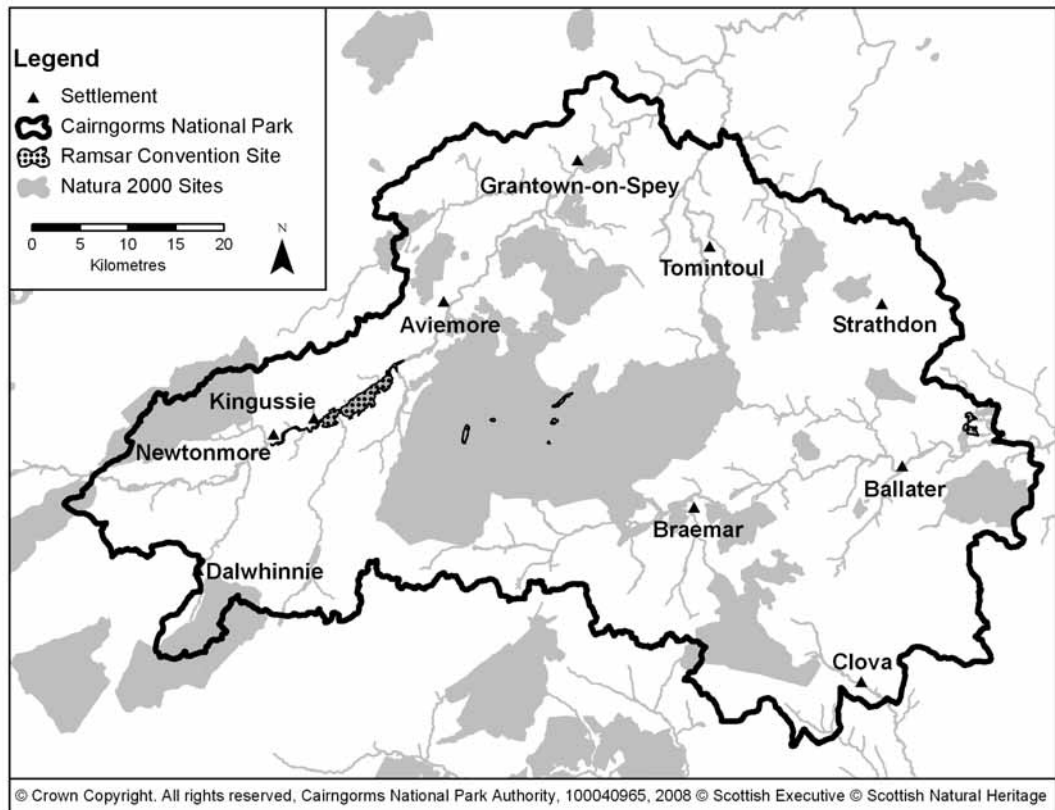
<b>Figure 5.1 – Key baseline facts</b>	
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Key Facts</b>
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25% of UK's threatened species present</li> <li>• 12.5% of Scotland's semi-natural woodland cover</li> <li>• Habitat types present include: montane; dwarf shrub heath; conifer woodland; broadleaved and mixed woodland; acid grassland; fen, marsh and swamp; standing water; rivers and streams</li> <li>• UK BAP Species include: upland oak and birch woodland; bog woodland (largest extent in Scotland); juniper; capercaillie; black grouse; Scottish crossbill</li> <li>• Habitats listed under Annex 1 of EU Habitats Directive include: dry heaths; alpine and boreal heaths; sub-arctic willow scrub; siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands, Nardus grasslands; calcareous flushes</li> <li>• Close proximity of lowground, woodland, water, upland and montane habitats</li> </ul>
Designated Nature Conservation Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 39% of Park area designated for natural heritage</li> <li>• 19 SAC sites</li> <li>• 12 SPA sites</li> <li>• 46 SSSIs (some of which are of geological importance)</li> <li>• 3 Ramsar Sites</li> <li>• 6 National Nature Reserves</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> State of the Park Report: Cairngorms National Park (CNPA, 2006), is available on the CNPA website or on request.

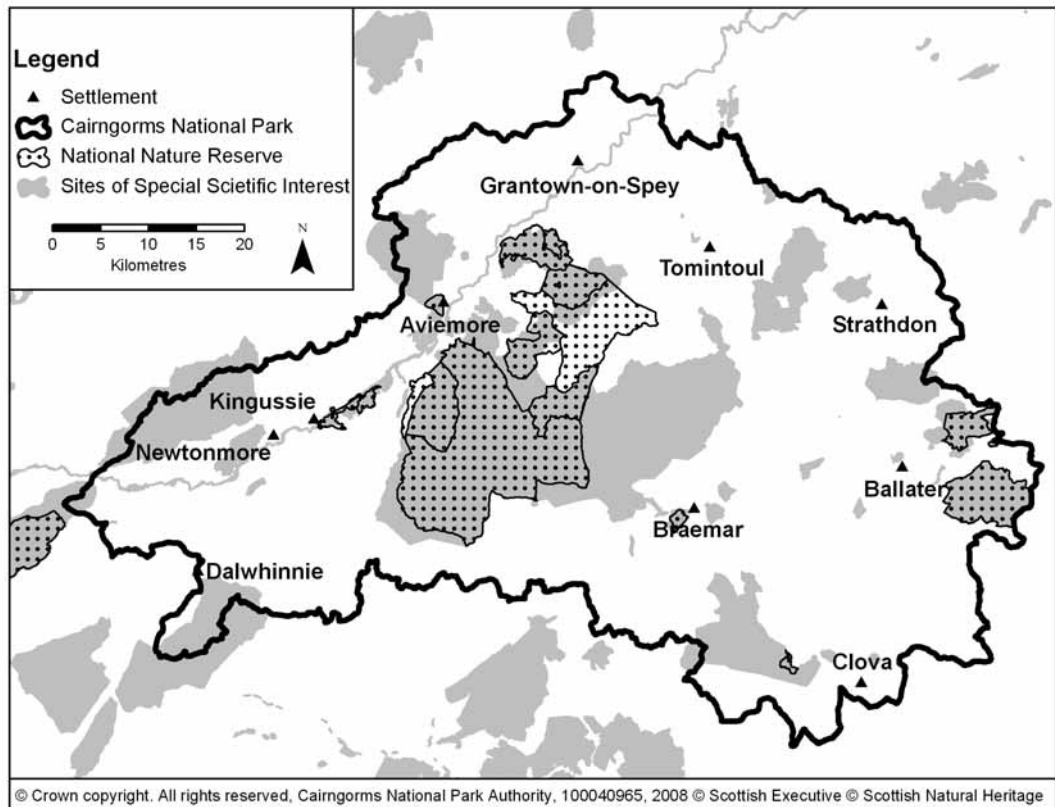
<b>Figure 5.1 – Key baseline facts <i>continued</i></b>	
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Key Facts</b>
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 SSSIs with soils of international importance</li> <li>• 12 SSSIs with soils of national importance</li> <li>• High proportion of undisturbed soils (only 2% cultivated)</li> <li>• Podzols form 50% of soil cover including internationally significant alpine podzols on the plateau</li> <li>• Peat forms 13% of soil cover</li> </ul>
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2001 Census: 16,024 people</li> <li>• Population density 0.04 people/Ha (lower than Scottish average)</li> <li>• 25.8% of population over 60 (higher than Scottish average)</li> <li>• Average health index in top 25% of Scotland (based on deprivation indices)</li> </ul>
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 designated Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes</li> <li>• 60 Scheduled Ancient Monuments</li> <li>• 424 listed buildings</li> <li>• 3 Conservation Areas</li> <li>• 4778 records in NMRS</li> <li>• Large number of historic landscapes</li> <li>• Potential for survival of many unknown remains in upland areas</li> </ul>
Earth Heritage Landforms and Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 National Scenic Areas</li> <li>• 30 GCR sites (of which some are part or all SSSI)</li> <li>• Granite massif and plateau</li> <li>• Internationally important landform record</li> <li>• Coherent identity of landscape across Park from landform and landcover</li> <li>• Land-use cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42% dwarf shrub heath</li> <li>• 28% montane habitats</li> <li>• 11% coniferous woodland</li> <li>• 2% broadleaved/mixed woodland</li> <li>• 3% improved grassland</li> <li>• 0.4% built areas</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Figure 5.1 – Key baseline facts <i>continued</i></b>	
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Key Facts</b>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3,362km of running water habitat</li> <li>• 81% of streams classified as excellent (A1) or good (A2) (SEPA 2003)</li> <li>• 20 sq km standing waters</li> <li>• Catchments of 6 major rivers</li> </ul>
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively low atmospheric pollution</li> </ul>
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual precipitation over 2250mm on summits and under 900mm in straths</li> <li>• Average annual snow cover 200 days on summits and 50 days on low-ground</li> <li>• Prevailing winds from south-west</li> </ul>
Outdoor Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public right of responsible access</li> <li>• 49 Munros including 5 summits over 4000 feet</li> <li>• 3 ski centres</li> <li>• National Cycle Network Route 7</li> <li>• 1 Long Distance Route (Speyside Way)</li> <li>• 179 Rights of Way</li> <li>• Around 40 promoted path networks</li> <li>• National importance for outdoor access, with significant levels of use across a wide range of activities</li> </ul>
Energy and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant energy generation within the Park</li> </ul>
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Conservation Areas</li> <li>• Distinctive local vernacular architecture</li> </ul>

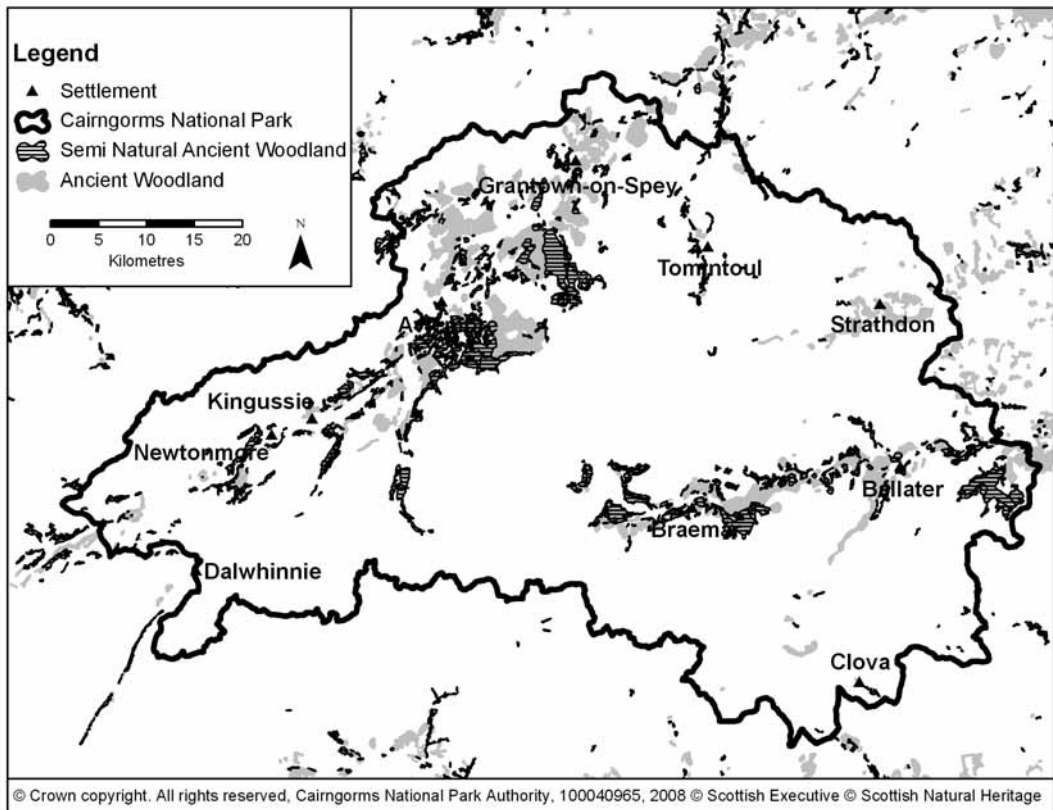
Map 5.1 – International nature conservation designations



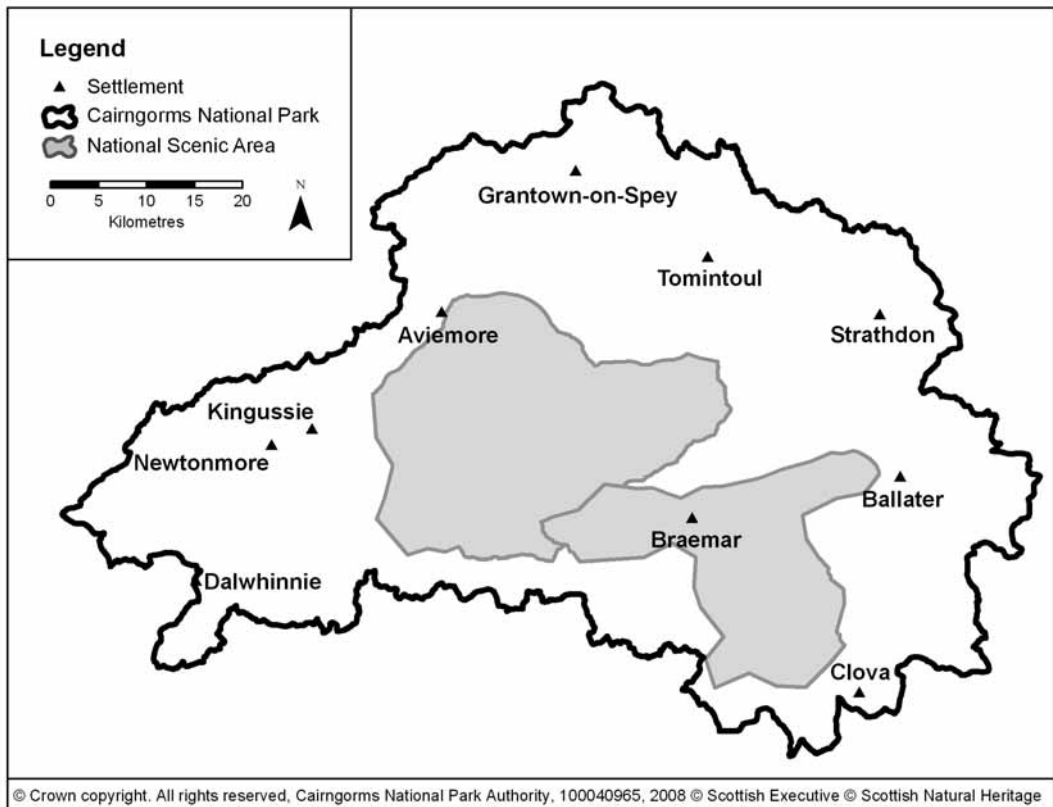
Map 5.2 – National nature conservation designations



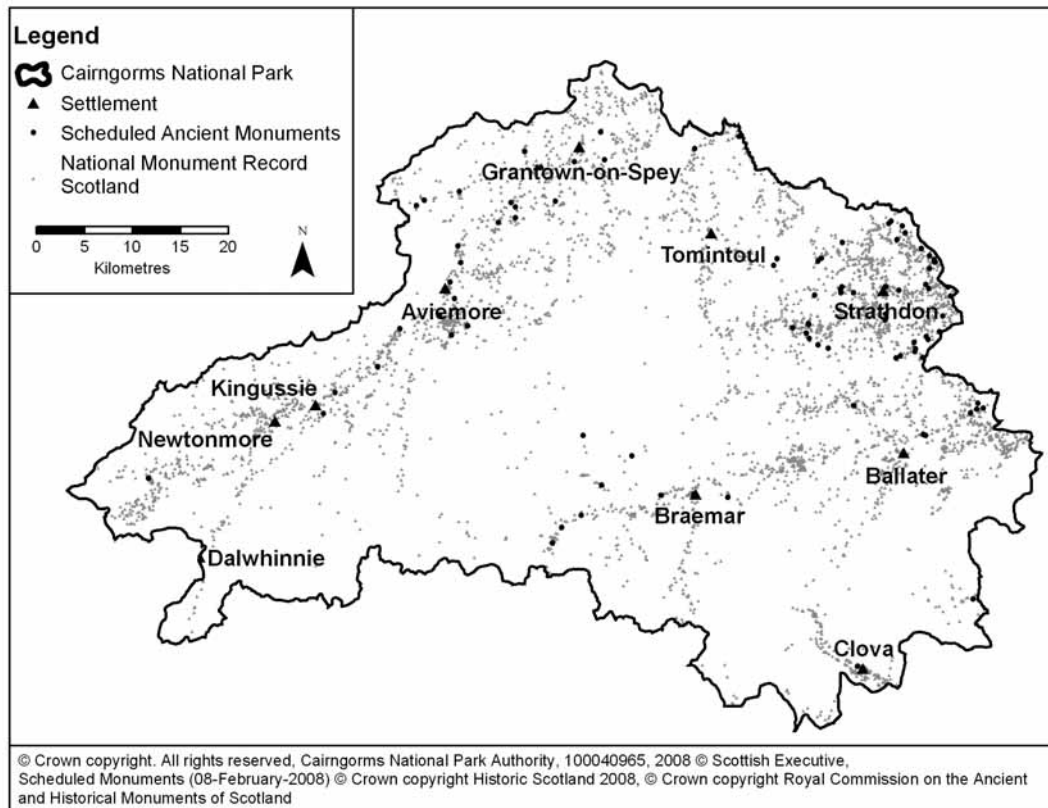
Map 5.3 – Ancient woodland sites



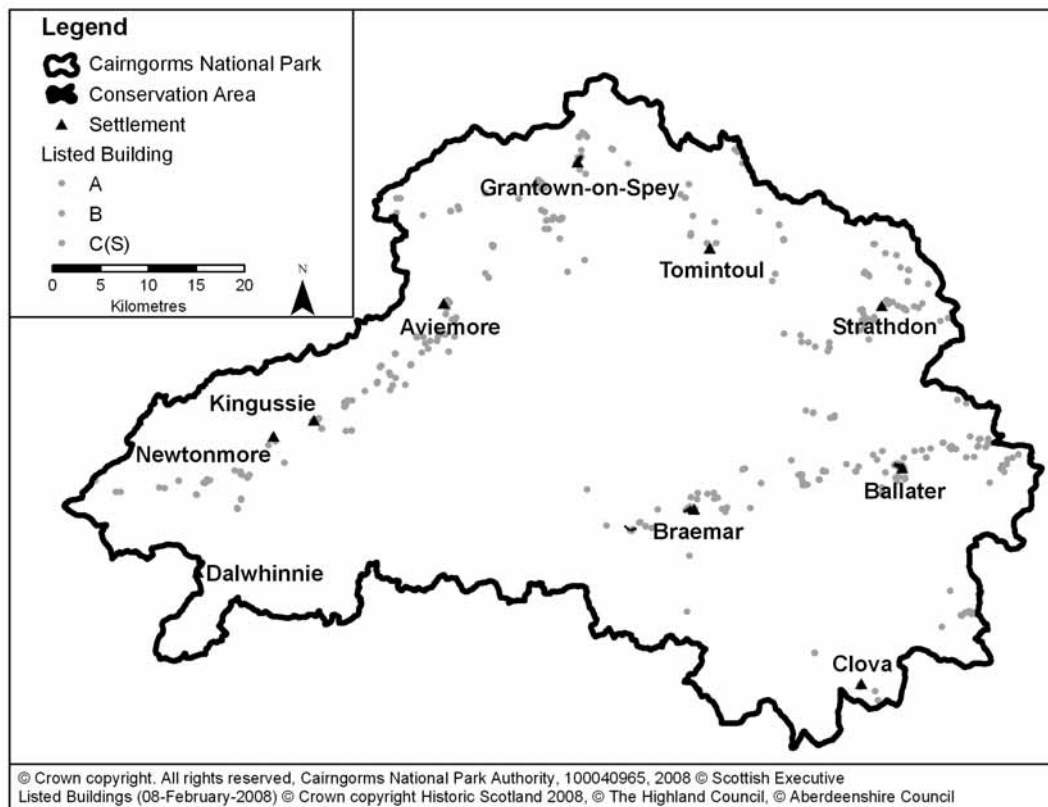
Map 5.4 – National Scenic Areas



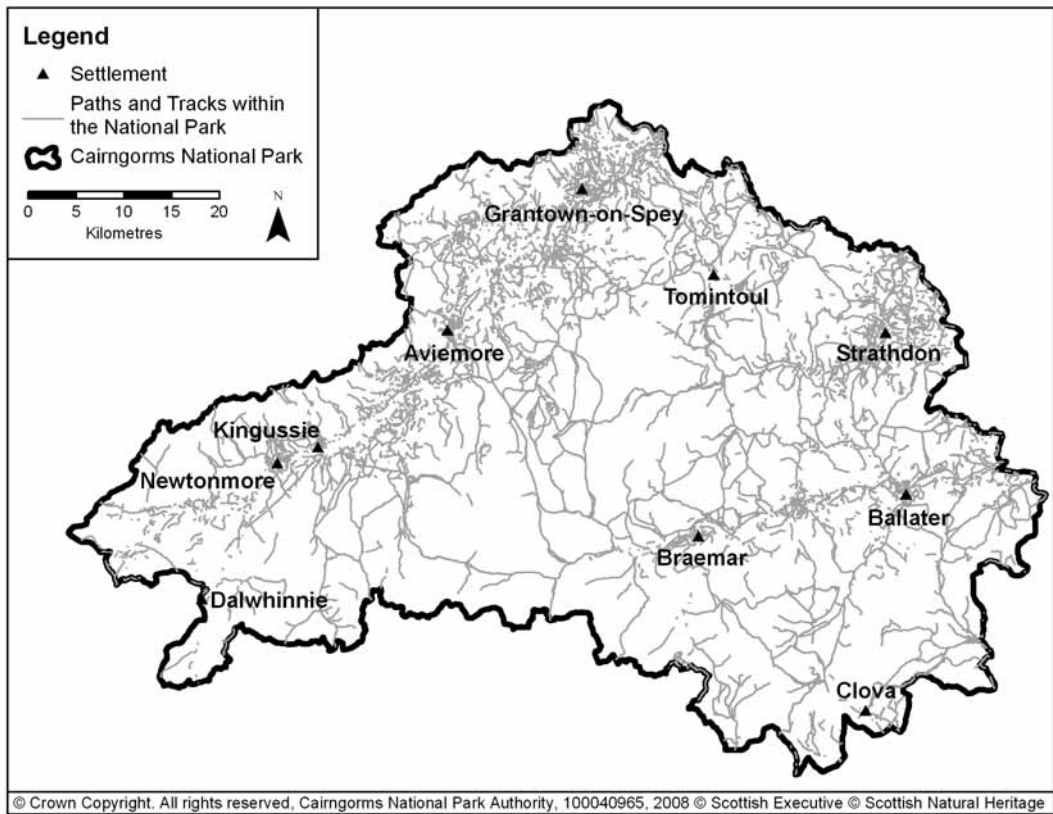
Map 5.5 – Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other monument records



Map 5.6 – Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas



Map 5.7 – Informal recreation (paths and tracks)



## Environmental issues in the Cairngorms National Park

**5.3** The State of the Park Report and key issues research provide information on the current trends and key issues in each environmental resource category in the Cairngorms. Figure 5.2 summarises the key trends and issues for each. Those key issues which have been identified as being within the scope of the Draft Core Paths Plan have been highlighted in bold.

<b>Figure 5.2 – Key trends and issues in the Cairngorms</b>		
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Key trends</b>	<b>Key issues</b>
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some continued habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration</li> <li>• Vegetation limited by grazing pressure</li> <li>• Continued introductions and spread of non-native species</li> <li>• Increase in native woodland cover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ecosystem integrity and connectivity</b></li> <li>• Impact of non-native species</li> <li>• <b>Impact of climate change</b></li> <li>• <b>Impact of recreation</b></li> <li>• <b>Impact of development</b></li> <li>• Incomplete data</li> </ul>
Designated Nature Conservation Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing account of external impacts to sites (Nature Conservation Act 2004)</li> <li>• Recent expansion of Natura 2000 designations</li> <li>• Review of NNR designations</li> <li>• Significant percentage of designated sites currently in unfavourable condition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Management practices</b></li> <li>• Long-term security of management objectives</li> <li>• <b>Integration with wider land-use</b></li> <li>• <b>Identification of where recreation may be contributing to unfavourable condition of sites</b></li> </ul>
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageing population</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implications for community dynamics</b></li> <li>• Implications for development patterns</li> <li>• Implications for human resources</li> </ul>
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land-use change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impact of new development</b></li> <li>• Extension of forest cover</li> <li>• Agricultural changes from CAP reform</li> <li>• <b>Impact of visitors</b></li> </ul>
Landforms and Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in woodland cover</li> <li>• Decline in heather moorland cover</li> <li>• Increase in research on landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impact of development</b></li> <li>• <b>Recreation pressure</b></li> <li>• Connectivity of land cover</li> <li>• <b>Impacts of tracks and paths</b></li> </ul>



**Figure 5.2 – Key trends and issues in the Cairngorms *continued***

Resource	Key trends	Key issues
<i>Landforms and Landscape continued</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorly designed and located built development including communications and utilities infrastructure</li> <li>• Poorly designed and managed forest plantations</li> <li>• Growing impacts of ATV tracking</li> <li>• Limited understanding of people's perceptions of landscape values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewable energy developments</li> <li>• <b>Perceptions of 'wildness'</b></li> </ul>
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil erosion on higher slopes and plateaux</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impacts of recreation</b></li> <li>• Lack of information on soil use and development</li> <li>• Grazing and trampling by herbivores</li> </ul>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acidification (atmospheric)</li> <li>• Decline in native fish stocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diffuse pollution from agricultural ground</li> <li>• River modification</li> <li>• <b>Catchment processes and flood management</b></li> <li>• Availability for consumption</li> <li>• <b>Impact of recreation</b></li> </ul>
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change - increasing temperature and precipitation expected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Atmospheric pollution</b></li> </ul>
Outdoor Access and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing range of outdoor recreation activities</li> <li>• New public right of responsible access</li> <li>• More managed path networks</li> <li>• Increased level of upland path provision and repair</li> <li>• Diversification of ski centres into summer activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development increasing or reducing access opportunities</b></li> <li>• <b>Impact of access on habitats and species</b></li> <li>• <b>Landscape impact of access infrastructure</b></li> <li>• <b>Accessibility of environment for all</b></li> </ul>
Energy and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing demand for renewable (particularly windfarm) sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impact of transmission pylons and windfarm developments</li> <li>• Use of non-renewable energy sources</li> </ul>

Figure 5.2 – Key trends and issues in the Cairngorms <i>continued</i>		
Resource	Key trends	Key issues
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abandonment or conversion of farm steadings</li> <li>• Significant demand for new housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decay of listed buildings</li> <li>• <b>Impact of development on settlement character</b></li> </ul>

### Limitations of data

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

- **Information is fragmented across the Park area, with some sites or areas having been more closely studied than others.** Of particular relevance to the Draft Core Paths Plan is that the wealth of information collected for one or two key recreational sites in the Park is not reflected in as comprehensive a manner for the majority of the area.
- **The formal geography of the Cairngorms National Park is a new boundary, to which data has not been collected in the past.** The Park boundary cuts across four different local authority areas, and different sections of other agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage. This means that in the past data has often been collected for different areas using different standards and methodologies.
- **Data is held in different forms.** Some data is well suited to straightforward assessment and query, whereas others are not.

### Evolution of the environment without the Draft Core Paths Plan

**5.5** The Directive requires the likely evolution of the environment without the Plan to be considered. The trends identified above are expected to continue in the absence of new policy or actions to address them. In particular, a number of the issues that are related to the impacts of outdoor access and recreation are considered likely to continue in the absence of policies or action plans to address them.

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

**5.7** The Core Paths Plan is the main tool for developing access and recreation in the Park. Without a Plan detailing core paths it is unlikely that there would be consistency in policy or delivery across the Park.

## 6. SEA Objectives

- 6.1** The SEA objectives (Figure 6.1) are informed by the need to cover the range of issues outlined in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations (Annex 1 (f) of the Directive: biodiversity; population; human health; fauna; flora; soil; water; air; climatic factors; material assets; cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage; landscape; and the interrelationship between those issues).
- 6.2** The SEA objectives are also informed by the key environmental resources, trends and issues that are relevant to the Cairngorms National Park, set out in Section 5.

<b>Figure 6.1 – SEA objectives</b>	
<b>Cairngorms National Park draft SEA objectives</b>	<b>Relevant SEA environmental topics</b>
1. To conserve and enhance the diversity of species	Flora, fauna, biodiversity, landscape, water, soil, material assets, human health
2. To conserve and enhance the diversity of habitats	Flora, fauna, biodiversity, landscape, water, soil, material assets, human health
3. To maintain and enhance the integrity of ecosystems	Flora, fauna, biodiversity, landscape, water, soil, material assets, human health
4. To protect and where appropriate improve, waterbody status within or related to the Cairngorms National Park area	Water, flora, fauna, landscape, biodiversity, soil, human health, material assets
5. To maintain catchment processes and hydrological systems	Water, flora, fauna, landscape, biodiversity, soil, human health, material assets
6. To maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape and cultural character of the Park	Landscape, flora, fauna, biodiversity, soils, material assets, cultural heritage, human health, wild land
7. To ensure responsible access for all	Human health, population
8. To maintain and improve air quality	Air, climatic factors, water, human health, flora, fauna, biodiversity, soil
9. To use natural resources/material assets in a sustainable way	Flora, fauna, biodiversity, diversity, landscape, water, air soil, material assets, human health

<b>Figure 6.1 – SEA objectives <i>continued</i></b>	
<b>Cairngorms National Park draft SEA objectives <i>continued</i></b>	<b>Relevant SEA environmental topics <i>continued</i></b>
10. To conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment	Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage, material assets, landscape
11. To maintain a sustainable and healthy population	Population, human health
12. To improve sustainable energy efficiency	Air, climatic factors, material assets
13. To reduce waste and pollution	Air, water, soil, flora, fauna, biodiversity, human health
14. To maintain and enhance the quality of the built environment	Landscape, material assets, cultural heritage, human health, population, climatic factors

**6.3** The 14 SEA objectives are a broad set of objectives that can be applied to assess the aim and objectives and the Area Networks of the Draft Core Paths Plan. To assess the Plan's potential effect on these objectives, a set of more detailed and targeted criteria reflecting the key issues are required for each one.

**6.4** These criteria are therefore used to determine the potential effects in relation to the SEA objectives, in the context of the environmental resources and issues relevant to the Cairngorms. The criteria are shown in Figure 6.2 below.

<b>Figure 6.2 – SEA criteria</b>	
<b>SEA objectives</b>	<b>Draft Core Paths Plan SEA criteria</b>
1. To conserve and enhance the diversity of species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent loss of priority species*</li> <li>• Minimise recreational impact on designated sites</li> <li>• Identify impacts on Natura 2000 sites and species</li> </ul> <p>* Priority species are species that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualifying criteria of SPAs or SACs;</li> <li>• Notified features on SSSIs;</li> <li>• Listed in Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive;</li> <li>• Listed as of community interest in Annexes II, IV and V of the Habitats directive;</li> <li>• Species listed in schedules 1, 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended; or</li> <li>• Listed in the UK BAP or Cairngorms LBAP</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.2 – SEA criteria *continued***

SEA objectives	Draft Core Paths Plan SEA criteria
<p>2. To conserve and enhance the diversity of habitats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise disturbance to priority habitats*</li> <li>• Minimise recreational impact on designated sites</li> <li>• Consider impacts of new and increased activities on species</li> <li>• Identify impacts on Natura 2000 sites</li> </ul> <p>* Priority habitats are habitats that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualifying criteria of SPAs or SACs;</li> <li>• Notified features on SSSIs;</li> <li>• Listed in Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive;</li> <li>• Listed as of community interest in Annexes II, IV and V of the Habitats directive;</li> <li>• Of naturally occurring wild birds, particularly those in Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive and migratory species;</li> <li>• Listed in the UK BAP or Cairngorms LBAP; or</li> <li>• Native woodlands, including ancient woodland sites in the Ancient Woodland Inventory</li> </ul>
<p>3. To maintain and enhance the integrity of ecosystems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent fragmentation of habitats</li> <li>• Ensure recreation and associated infrastructure does not create new barriers to native species movement.</li> </ul>
<p>4. To protect and where appropriate improve, waterbody status within or related to the Cairngorms National Park area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and avoid significant adverse downstream impacts from new recreation infrastructure</li> <li>• Ensure new recreation infrastructure developments are appropriately sited to minimise disturbance and potential pollution</li> </ul>
<p>5. To maintain catchment processes and hydrological systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise pollution risks of recreation activity and infrastructure development</li> <li>• Avoid interference with natural fluvial processes</li> </ul>
<p>6. To maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape and cultural character of the Park</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise recreational impacts on landscape character and experience, including wild land qualities</li> <li>• Ensure recreation infrastructure is sited and designed to make a positive contribution to landscape character</li> </ul>

<b>Figure 6.2 – SEA criteria <i>continued</i></b>	
<b>SEA objectives</b>	<b>Draft Core Paths Plan SEA criteria</b>
6. <i>continued</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve geodiversity (geological and geomorphological features) and the integrity of natural processes and systems</li> </ul>
7. To ensure responsible access for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent loss/fragmentation of access networks and open greenspace</li> <li>• Create appropriate new access opportunities</li> <li>• Promote safe access provision and use</li> </ul>
8. To maintain and improve air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise need for travel by private car</li> </ul>
9. To use natural resources/material assets in a sustainable way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage use of local materials in development of recreation infrastructure</li> </ul>
10. To conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise recreation impacts on archaeological sites and/or their setting</li> <li>• Minimise recreation impacts on designed landscapes</li> </ul>
11. To maintain a sustainable and healthy population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure non-car access to services for communities</li> <li>• Ensure access to recreation opportunities</li> <li>• Encourage communities and visitors to be more active</li> </ul>
12. To improve sustainable energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximise energy efficiency of new recreation development through sustainable materials and construction</li> <li>• Minimise need for use of private cars</li> </ul>
13. To reduce waste and pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise pollution from human waste in the countryside</li> <li>• Ensure waste is not left in the countryside</li> <li>• Minimise need for use of private cars</li> </ul>
14. To maintain and enhance the quality of the built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure quality in new recreation infrastructure design</li> <li>• Ensure Listed Buildings are undamaged by recreational activity or infrastructure development</li> </ul>

## 7. Core Paths Plan Strategic Alternatives

- 7.1** The Cairngorms National Park Authority has a statutory duty to produce a Core Paths Plan for the Park. The Plan has been developed in line with this duty as well as in context with the Park Plan and Outdoor Access Strategy. Much of the strategic direction of the Core Paths Plan is therefore set by other plans, policies and legislation. The Park Authority considered a number of alternative scenarios for developing the Core Paths Plan before choosing the approach outlined in the Draft Core Paths Plan.
- 7.2** The aim and objectives used to select the core paths network were developed through public consultation, guidance and the SEA process. The objectives were initially proposed as 'Selection Criteria' but it was found that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work right across the Park. As such a more general set of objectives was developed to help select core paths for the different areas of the Park.
- 7.3** It was initially proposed to select the core paths network on an area by area basis based on the community council areas. When developing the Plan, however, it was found that the Action Areas as identified in the Outdoor Access Strategy are a more appropriate geography to work from. The objectives used to select the core paths were altered to include an objective to help deliver the priorities for the area as identified in the Outdoor Access Strategy. This ensures that each area has an appropriate network identified which addresses the access priorities within that area.

## 8. Assessment of the Draft Core Path Plan Aim and Objectives

How environmental issues were considered in developing the aims and objectives

- 8.1** The aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan have evolved through public engagement and consultation with public agencies and other groups and bodies, eg SNH, the Local Outdoor Access Forum etc. The aim and objectives have been influenced and guided by the four aims of the Cairngorms National Park as interpreted by the Park Plan and the Outdoor Access Strategy.
- 8.2** The special qualities of the Park are closely linked to the natural and cultural heritage of the area. As such many of the objectives, and in particular the first and second one, will provide robust protection to a wide range of environmental interests that are also reflected in the SEA objectives.

The significant environmental effects of the aims and objectives

- 8.3** The following section describes the predicted environmental effects of the aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan. The full assessment record for the aim and objectives is shown in Annex 3 (available on request).
- 8.4** The aim and objectives has an overall strongly positive effect on the SEA objectives. This is largely due to the way in which the Draft Core Path Plan has been developed taking into account the policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Cairngorms National Park Plan.

Judgements of the significance of environmental effects

- 8.5** The assessment shows that the aim and objectives are likely to have strongly positive effects for a large number of the SEA objectives, positive effects for some others and no negative effects. As such it is judged that the aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan will have a strongly positive environmental effect.

Cumulative effects

- 8.6** It was considered unlikely that the aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan would have negative, cumulative or synergistic effects.

Proposed mitigation

- 8.7** It is considered that the aim and objectives will have strongly positive effects and as such no mitigation or modifications are proposed.



## Uncertainties and risks

- 8.8** There is some level of uncertainty in the assessment of the Draft Core Paths Plan as we can only predict the effect of the aim and objectives based on our own judgments rather than on past evidence. This uncertainty carries a level of risk. This risk, however, will be managed through monitoring of the Core Paths Plan and accompanying Environmental Report.

## 9. Assessment of Area Network Proposals

### How environmental issues were considered in developing the Area Network Proposals

- 9.1** The aim and objectives of the Draft Core Paths Plan were used to identify the core paths network on an area by area basis. The areas identified are based on the eight 'Action Areas' identified within the Outdoor Access Strategy<sup>10</sup>. The Outdoor Access Strategy identifies priorities for action within each of the areas and the objectives of the Core Paths Plan reflect the need to incorporate these priorities into the selection of core paths for each area. The first and second objectives used to select the core paths for each area identify the need to consider the Park's natural and cultural heritage whilst encouraging responsible behaviour and helping those working on the land.

### The significant environmental effects of the Area Network Proposals

- 9.2** The following section describes the predicted environmental effects of the Area Network Proposals. Each Area Network Proposal has an overall strongly positive effect on the SEA objectives. This is largely due to the way in which the Draft Core Path Plan has been developed taking into account the policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Park Plan. The full assessment record for each Area Network Proposal is shown in Annex 4 (available on request).

### Judgements of the significance of environmental effects

- 9.3** It became apparent during the assessment that all of the Area Network Proposals are likely to have some effect on the environment. Nearly all of the area networks have strongly positive effects for SEA objectives 7 and 11, the criteria for both of which relate to outdoor access. None of the area networks were considered to have an overall strongly positive or strongly negative environmental effect. Smaller positive or negative impacts are an important consideration in developing the Draft Core Paths Plan, which seeks to maximise environmental enhancement. However, they have been considered as unlikely to be significant in the assessment. The score given for each area network in relation to each SEA objective is shown in Figure 9.1 overleaf.

<sup>10</sup> Enjoying the Cairngorms: Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012 (CNPA 2007), is available on the CNPA website or on request.

Figure 9.1 – SEA assessment summary														
Outdoor Access Strategy Action Area Proposals	SEA Objectives													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Action Area A	=	=	=	=	=	=	++	=	=	=	+	=	=	=
Action Area B	?	?	=	=	=	=	++	?	=	=	+	?	?	=
Action Area C	+	+	=	+	+	+	++	++	++	+	++	++	++	+
Action Area D	=	=	=	?	?	+	++	++	+	=	++	++	+	+
Action Area E	+	+	+	=	=	=	++	+	+	=	++	+	++	+
Action Area F	+	+	=	=	=	+	++	++	+	=	++	+	+	+
Action Area G	+	+	+	+	+	+	++	++	++	=	++	++	++	+
Action Area H	+	+	=	=	=	+	++	++	++	+	++	++	++	+
Cumulative Score*	5	5	2	2	2	5	16	11	9	2	14	10	10	6
* Cumulative score calculated on basis of 2 points for each ++ and 1 point for each + score. See Paragraph 9.14 for further information.														
<b>Scoring Codes</b> <b>++ Strongly positive effects      + Positive effect      - - Strongly negative effect</b> <b>= Neutral or no effect      - Negative effect      ? uncertain effects      / not applicable</b>														

Commentary on likely significant effects

9.4 Overall, the effects identified are positive. This is largely due to the way in which the Area Network Proposals have been developed by the application of the Core Paths Plan objectives and the influence of the Outdoor Access Strategy and Park Plan, all of which take their starting point as the four aims of the Park. A commentary on the likely significant effect on the environment follows for each of the area network proposals in the Draft Core Paths Plan.

## Action Area A – Central Cairngorms

- 9.5** The proposed core paths network in this area will have positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all and maintaining a sustainable population. It is not proposed to develop recreation infrastructure in the area or increase/change promotion or signage and as such the network should have a neutral or no effect on the SEA objectives and criteria. Where works are required they will be done in line with policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy which itself was subject to the SEA process. Whilst it is not proposed to further promote the existing paths, all core paths will be displayed on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Maps. It is unlikely, however, that this will result in increased use of the paths as the majority of people who might buy a map of that area will already have some idea of their right of access and the access opportunities that exist. The proposed paths are also already clearly marked on Ordnance Survey maps at present and have existing Right of Way signage at either end.

## Action Area B - Eastern Cairngorms

- 9.6** The proposed core paths network in this area will have positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all and positive effects for maintaining a sustainable population. The network in the area is already well promoted and well used but is generally accessed by private car. As such it is unknown as to whether or not use of private cars will increase due to designation. The network does cater for people living locally, however, who may access parts of it on foot or bicycle. The path up Glen Isla leads people towards the SAC and SPA at Caenlochan, the path is already in existence and provides people with access to a point of interest, it is unknown as to whether or not this would increase people's desire to carry on into the Caenlochan area.

## Action Area C - Upper Deeside

- 9.7** The proposed network should have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, improving air quality, using natural resources in a sustainable way, maintaining a sustainable and healthy population, improving energy efficiency and reducing waste and pollution. No negative effects have been identified.

## Action Area D - Upper Donside

- 9.8** The proposed core paths network in this area will have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, maintaining a sustainable and healthy population and improving sustainable energy efficiency.
- 9.9** There are some unknown effects in relation to the potential impact of the construction of a Bridge over the River Don. This proposal would only be implemented subject to planning permission and consultation with SNH, SEPA and other bodies. As such the proposal would not be implemented should it be found that it would have significant negative effects that could not be mitigated.

## Action Area E - Glenlivet and Tomintoul

**9.10** The proposed core paths network in this area will have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, maintaining a sustainable population and reducing waste and pollution. There will also be positive effects for a number of other objectives. No negative effects have been identified.

## Action Area F - Lower Badenoch and Strathspey

**9.11** The proposed core paths network for this area will have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, maintaining a sustainable and healthy population and improving sustainable energy efficiency.

## Action Area G - Upper Badenoch and Strathspey

**9.12** The proposed network should have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, improving air quality, using natural resources in a sustainable way, maintaining a sustainable and healthy population, improving energy efficiency and reducing waste and pollution. No negative effects have been identified.

## Action Area H - Glenmore and Rothiemurchus

**9.13** The proposed network should have strongly positive effects on ensuring responsible access for all, improving air quality, using natural resources in a sustainable way, maintaining a sustainable and healthy population, improving energy efficiency and reducing waste and pollution. The only infrastructure development in the area will be the proposed off-road route which is already under construction having been granted planning permission. The route has been subject to appropriate assessment and consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, as such there should be no negative effects arising from this development.

## Cumulative effects

**9.14** None of the area networks were identified as having an overall significant effect. Where several Area Network proposals have a small, but not individually significant effect on one of the SEA objectives, they may cumulatively add up to a significant effect. The method used in the summary Figure 9.1 on page 43 applies a point score to each positive (+) and strongly positive (++) result so that the cumulative effects can be identified.

**9.15** From this analysis, all SEA objectives show a degree of positive score when their results are aggregated. The strongest cumulative positive effects are recorded against SEA objectives 7 (responsible access for all) and 11 (maintaining a sustainable and healthy population).

## Proposed mitigation

- 9.16** Development of all new recreation infrastructures will be done in line with the policies in the Outdoor Access Strategy which encourage high quality specification and design, using local materials where appropriate, and striving to retain wild qualities in upland areas.

## Uncertainties and risks

- 9.17** There is some level of uncertainty in the assessment of the Draft Core Paths Plan as we can only predict the effect of the Area Network proposals based on our own judgments rather than on past evidence. This uncertainty carries a level of risk. This risk, however, will be managed through monitoring of the Core Paths Plan and accompanying Environmental Report.

## 10. Future Development of the Core Paths Plan and SEA

### Timetable

**10.1** The Draft Core Paths Plan together with this Environmental Report is open to public consultation until 30 June 2008. On completion of the consultation, the Park Authority will work to finalise the Core Paths Plan. The estimated timetable is:

- Draft Core Paths Plan and Environmental Report out to formal public consultation – 1 April to 30 June 2008;
- Working to resolve objections to Draft Core Paths Plan – 1 July to 30 September 2008;
- If all objections resolved move to adopt Core Paths Plan and update Environmental Report – October 2008;
- If there are outstanding objections to the Core Paths Plan CNPA submit these to Scottish Ministers, there may then be a Public Local Inquiry – estimated as October 2008;
- Prepare a Post-adoption Statement – timetable dependent on Scottish Ministers.

### Proposals for monitoring the environmental effects

**10.2** A framework for monitoring the environmental effects of the Core Paths Plan will be developed with the wider development of monitoring for the Outdoor Access Strategy. It is proposed to develop a set of health indicators, together with more detailed performance monitoring, for the Plan. This process will be informed by the consultation on the Draft Core Paths Plan and this Environmental Report.

### SEA indicators and targets

**10.3** It is proposed to develop the SEA objectives and criteria set out in Section 6 (see page 35) into indicators and targets that can be used to monitor the environmental performance of the Core Paths Plan against the SEA objectives. These are not yet complete, and are expected to be further developed during consultation on the Core Paths Plan.

**10.4** The initial proposals for SEA indicators and targets are shown in Figure 10.1 below.

<b>Figure 10.1 – Proposed SEA indicators and targets</b>		
<b>SEA objectives</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>
1. To conserve and enhance the diversity of species	• Loss of priority species or associated habitats	• No loss of priority species • No loss of priority species' habitats
2. To conserve and enhance the diversity of habitats	• Loss of priority habitats	• No loss of priority habitats

<b>Figure 10.1 – Proposed SEA indicators and targets <i>continued</i></b>		
<b>SEA objectives</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>
3. To maintain and enhance the integrity of ecosystems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuity of priority habitats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No fragmentation of priority habitats</li> </ul>
4. To protect and where appropriate improve, waterbody status within or related to the Cairngorms National Park area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water quality</li> <li>• Ecological status of water bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No deterioration in waterbody status</li> </ul>
5. To maintain catchment processes and hydrological systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functioning wetland areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No loss of areas managed as functioning wetlands</li> </ul>
6. To maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape and cultural character of the Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to landscape character</li> <li>• Recreational infrastructure and paths works that complement landscape character</li> <li>• Loss/disturbance to geomorphological/geological features</li> <li>• Sense of wildness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All recreational infrastructure and paths works that are consented are considered to make a positive contribution to landscape character</li> <li>• No loss/disturbance to geological/geomorphological features</li> </ul>
7. To ensure responsible access for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase or decrease in provision of access routes</li> <li>• Increase or decrease in number of access issues reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance or enhancement of existing access provision</li> <li>• No loss of access to open greenspace</li> <li>• Decrease number of access issues occurring</li> </ul>
8. To maintain and improve air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollution emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease emissions</li> </ul>
9. To use natural resources /material assets in a sustainable way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational infrastructure developed using local materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All recreational infrastructure developed using local materials</li> </ul>
10. To conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condition of the site or setting of an archaeological site of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No recreational activities or developments having significant adverse effects on site or setting of archaeological site of importance in the National Park</li> </ul>



**Figure 10.1 – Proposed SEA indicators and targets *continued***

SEA objectives	Indicators	Targets
10. <i>continued</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condition of the site or setting of a designed landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No recreational activities or developments having significant adverse effects on site or setting of designed landscape of importance in the National Park</li> </ul>
11. To maintain a sustainable and healthy population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established and functioning core paths network</li> <li>• Increased use of path networks in and around communities</li> <li>• More people walking/ cycling to work/ school/local services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All communities to have a network of core paths to enable them to access services and recreation opportunities</li> <li>• Increased activity levels of residents and visitors</li> </ul>
12. To improve sustainable energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New recreation infrastructure developed using sustainable materials</li> <li>• More people walking/ cycling to work/school/ local services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new recreation infrastructure developed using sustainable materials</li> <li>• Reduced reliance on the private car</li> </ul>
13. To reduce waste and pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological status of waterbodies</li> <li>• Increase or decrease in litter at popular countryside sites</li> <li>• More people walking/ cycling to work/school/ local services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No pollution from human waste in the countryside</li> <li>• No litter left in the countryside</li> <li>• Reduced reliance on the private car</li> </ul>
14. To maintain and enhance the quality of the built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developments that complement the built environment</li> <li>• Condition of Listed Buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All recreational infrastructure that are consented are considered to make a positive contribution to the built environment</li> <li>• No recreational activities or developments having significant adverse effects on Listed Buildings</li> </ul>

## Annex 1 Links to other Plans and Programmes

Relevant plan/ programme	Objectives or requirements	How it affects or is affected by the Draft Core Paths Plan
Cairngorms National Park Plan	Sets out a long-term 25 year vision for the Park and strategic objectives to guide its management. Then it identifies the priorities for investment and action over the next five year period that will start to deliver the vision.	The Park Plan identifies the provision of high quality opportunities for outdoor access as one of its priorities for action over the next 5 years. The Core Paths Plan is the implementation plan for this priority in the Park Plan but it will also contribute to the delivery of wider actions within the Plan relating to eg transport.
Cairngorms National Park – Deposit Local Plan	Guides and controls the development and use of land in the Park at a detailed level.	Policies in the Local Plan relating to recreation, access management, signage and interpretation will guide the implementation of the Core Paths Plan.
Enjoying the Cairngorms – Cairngorms National Park, Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012	The Outdoor Access Strategy will develop the legal requirements for recreation and access under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and in addition, it will provide a framework for the future management and delivery of outdoor access.	Policies on Action Themes and Action Areas have guided the drafting of the Draft Core Paths Plan and will guide the implementation of the Core Paths Plan.

## Annex 2 – List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>Acronym/Abbreviation</b>	<b>Description</b>
ATV	All Terrain Vehicle
BAP Site	Biodiversity Action Plan Site
CNPA	Cairngorms National Park Authority
GCR	Geological Conservation Review Site
HGDL	Historic Garden and Designed Landscape
LBAP	Local Biodiversity Action Plan
NMR	National Monument Record
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NSA	National Scenic Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SEPA	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency