

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 Plan¹ and the Outdoor Access Strategy².
- 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.

¹ Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007, (CNPA 2007).

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

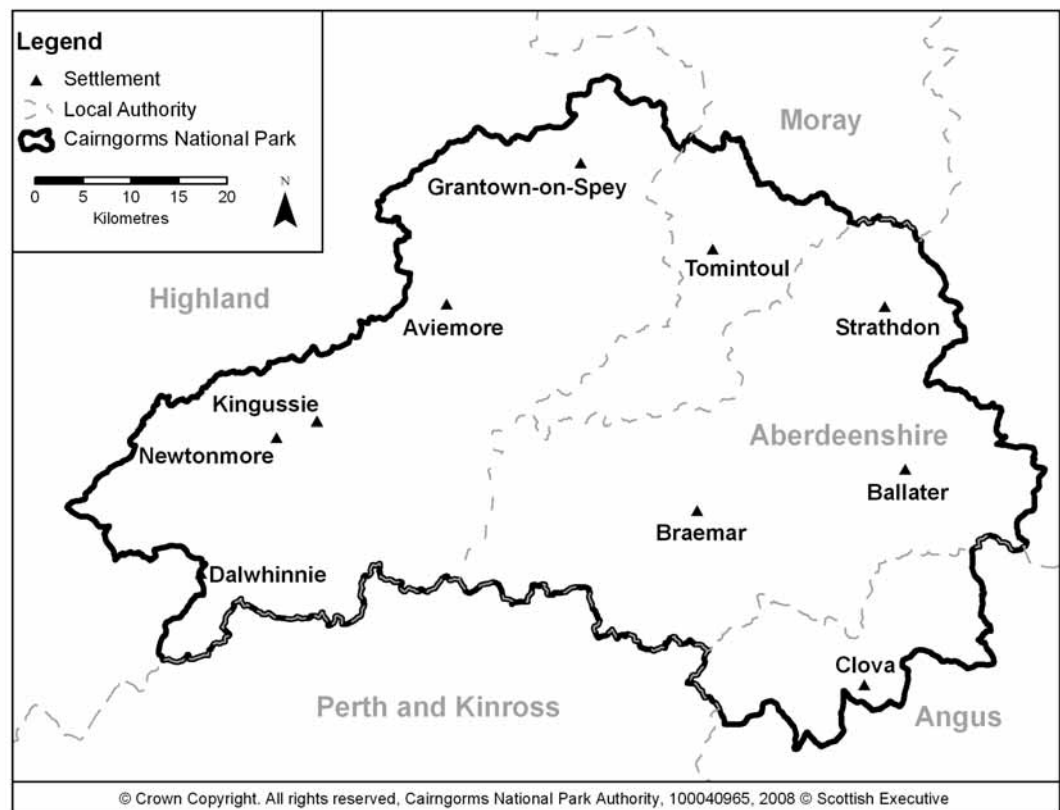
2. Introduction and Background

- 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, Laggan, Braemar, Strathdon and Tomintoul.

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.

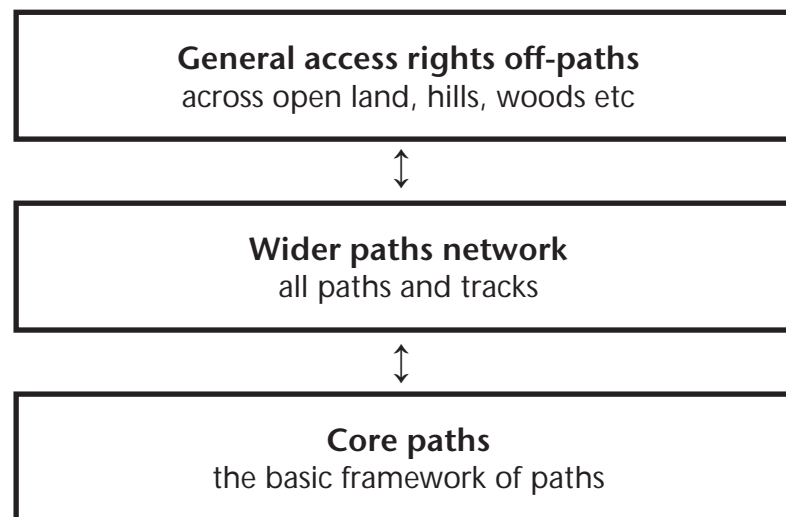
- 3.2** Article 1 of the Directive states that its objective is:
'to provide for a high level protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, 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

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3. Selecting the Core Paths Network

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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.