
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

**Title: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND STRATEGIC TOURISM
INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS**

Prepared by:

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Purpose

This paper introduces two Action Plans which are presented for approval, on Sustainable Tourism and Tourism Infrastructure; a summary of the end of season review of the management for visitors in 2022; and an overview of related grant expenditure on infrastructure.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) **Note** the work that has been undertaken by CNPA and partner organisations on management for visitors in 2022 (**Annex 1**)
- b) **Note** the summary of the grants awarded by CNPA to partners as part of the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme (**Annex 2**)
- c) **Approve** the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan for submission to Europarc along with documentation to apply for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (**Annex 3**)
- d) **Approve** the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan for submission to VisitScotland (**Annex 4**).

Background

- I. The National Park Partnership Plan was approved earlier in 2022 and it highlighted that a number of more specific Action Plans were required, as shown at **Figure 1**. Some of these Plans are already in place – notably the Local Development Plan for the Park which is particularly relevant in providing a comprehensive set of policies to ensure any built development will not damage the environment and will be well-integrated with other land uses. Other plans are in preparation and two are presented here for approval.

2. The need and rationale for each Action Plan is specific and involves submission of each Plan to an external body in order to justify strategic programmes of investment or accreditation as part of a wider scheme. Therefore, the format of each of the Action Plans is somewhat different. Each Plan adds value to the Outcomes and Objectives set out in the National Park Partnership Plan and assists in the development and maintenance of the partnership structures and relationships that are important for delivery. The hierarchy of plans is shown in **Figure I** with each Action Plan picking up primarily on the Nature (Green), People (Blue) and Place (Brown) sections of the Plan. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan is in preparation, advised by the Economic Steering Group.

Figure I: Graphic from the National Park Partnership Plan showing the hierarchy of plans for the Park



3. The Cairngorms National Park has been accredited with the “European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas” by the Europarc Federation since 2005. The Park has been re-accredited on a 5-yearly cycle, each time involving a visit from a team of international sustainable tourism experts. The Cairngorms National Park is currently one of only two destinations in UK, and the only National Park, to be accredited through the scheme.
4. The process of accreditation involves submission of a substantial package of material to Europarc, including a report on what has been delivered over the last five years and an Action Plan which must be in accord with the principles set out by Europarc:
 - a) Giving priority to protection
 - b) Contributing to sustainable development
 - c) Engaging all stakeholders
 - d) Planning sustainable tourism effectively
 - e) Pursuing continuous improvement.
5. All of the background information about the Charter process is available at <https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/>
6. In relation to the Infrastructure Plan, it is notable that in recent years the Cairngorms National Park has benefited from investment via the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, administered via VisitScotland. For example, projects have been supported at Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve and to improve car-parking and waste disposal; at Glenmore to improve active travel and pedestrian access; and at Glenshee Ski Centre to improve toilets.
7. In 2021 VisitScotland announced that funding was available for a select number of destinations to prepare Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plans. These Plans were intended to help underpin future funding bids and make the process more strategic and impactful. CNPA bid successfully for this funding and the proposed new Action Plan was embedded in the NP Partnership Plan.

Strategic Context

8. The National Park Partnership Plan has now been approved and acts as the Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the destination. There are of course many Objectives in the Plan that relate to sustainable tourism but the most directly relevant is in the Place section:
 - a) Objective C6: A Sustainable Destination – Secure the National Park’s reputation as an international exemplar in sustainable tourism and the management of protected areas.
 - b) Target: The NP continues to be accredited with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and the Glasgow Declaration (Climate Action in Tourism)
9. There are several references to the importance of improving Infrastructure in the NPPP and the most directly relevant Objective is:

- a) Objective C9: High quality visitor experience – Welcome visitors and provide high quality experience while managing their impacts through providing better infrastructure and high-quality Ranger Services
 - b) Targets:
 - i. Number of public toilets within the National Park is maintained
 - ii. Increased public toilet facilities for people with additional needs
- 10.** The Partnership Plan also sets out the five guiding principles for all capital investment in the National Park:
- a) **Green** - Infrastructure will contribute to delivering net zero and strengthening the natural and social capital of the National Park.
 - b) **Cairngorms** - Infrastructure will focus on the needs of the National Park and will contribute to the long-term outcomes as set out in the Partnership Plan.
 - c) **Employment** - Infrastructure will maximise local employment and support the development of a wellbeing economy.
 - d) **Long-term** - Infrastructure investment will be focused on long-term solutions to key issues around visitor management, transport, flood management etc.
 - e) **Equalities, diversity and inclusion** - Infrastructure will help to ensure that the Cairngorms is a Park for All.

Review on Management for Visitors in 2022

- 11.** The new arrangements for the Management of Visitors that had been put in place during 2020/21 period were continued and improved, comprising regular meetings of the Managing for Visitors Group the deployment of the CNPA Ranger Service and expenditure on capital improvements. Overall, the arrangements worked well, and a brief review is attached at **Annex A**. Looking ahead, the main areas to be developed in 2023 are:
- Implementation of projects arising from the National Park Partnership Plan and from the two Action Plans presented here and integration with the delivery phase of Cairngorms 2030 (Heritage Horizons) Programme.
 - Enhanced coordination of work in Cairngorm and Glenmore area, especially in relation to the management of transport and parking.
 - Increased use of CNPA Ranger Service for management and monitoring purposes as part of regular patrols.
 - Integration of visitor management activity with Geographic Information Systems and their use for planning and management purposes.
 - Further development of skills and training of ranger services with a focus on development of new entrants and young people.
 - Development of the new Active Cairngorms Action Plan which will also cover volunteering, green-health and activity, promoting outdoor access, outdoor learning, etc.

Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme

- 12.** Over the last two years CNPA has developed and delivered the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme which has supported a range of projects to address critical issues in the management for visitors by providing grant aid.

- 13.** In each year CNPA invited the submission of Expressions of Interest from land managers through the Managing for Visitors Group and assessed project proposals against the following criteria. Projects selected for funding should:
- Provide a warm welcome for visitors and support exceptional experiences
 - Mitigate any negative impacts from increased recreation in sensitive or popular sites
 - Reduce potential conflict between residents and visitors and/or between users
 - Promote collaboration across land management and organisational boundaries ensuring a positive visitor experience
 - Contribute to delivery of the Managing for Visitors Plan
- 14.** A brief report on how the scheme was developed and delivered is attached at **Annex B**. Assuming that suitable budget is approved in March 2023 a similar programme will be rolled out.

Process to develop the Action Plans

- 15.** To prepare each of the two Action Plans we have drawn on feedback received from the consultation on the National Park Partnership Plan in December 2021. Discussion has taken place alongside a trawl for project proposals and ideas with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership, the Managing for Visitors Group and the Equality Advisory Panel. CNPA Board had informal discussions sessions about the Infrastructure Plan in June 2022 and on both plans in October 2022.
- 16.** Since embarking on preparation of the Plan, CNPA has also been working on the development phase of the Cairngorms 2030 (Heritage Horizons) Programme, much of which involves the scoping and development of active travel and related infrastructure. The development phase of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme will not be complete by the time of submission of the Plans to VisitScotland and Eurpoarc and so an earlier mid-term review may be required, towards the end of 2023/24.

Next steps

- 17.** The key next steps with the work outlined above are:
- Dec 2022: Submission of each the two Action Plans to Europarc and to VisitScotland
 - March 2023: Corporate Plan and Operational Plan approval by Board including Heritage Horizons.
 - Spring 2023: Europarc Verifiers visit for Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and new phase of Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme
 - Jun 2023: Submission of plans for Delivery Phase of Cairngorms 2030 (Heritage Horizons) Programme
 - Dec 2023: Awards ceremony for Europarc Charter

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