



CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Active Cairngorms Action Plan Review

Introduction

We are currently developing the Active Cairngorms Action Plan, and are looking to gather the views from LOAF members on the emerging priority actions.

The higher-level work is already complete, and we are not seeking to identify new strategic objectives as these are already in place as part of the previous consultation and development of the National Park Partnership Plan. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will identify specific actions to deliver those strategic objectives.

LOAF members are asked to:

- Take note of progress to date;
- Consider the actions and advise on matters relating to the exercise of access rights including any additional actions required;
- Advise if appropriate about how the team could further improve their approach.

Background

Revision of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan (see annex 1) has been identified in National Park Partnership Plan 4 (NPPP4), see figure one, and is a key means to deliver many of the NPPP4 objectives.



Figure 1- Hierarchy of Plans

The proposed aim for the Active Cairngorms Action Plan is:

Our aim is for all residents and visitors to enjoy and use the Park responsibly every day.

The Active Cairngorms Action Plan is structured around the following priority areas of work:

1. Managing for Visitors- Our approach to managing visitor pressures at key hotspots:
2. Minimising recreational impacts on sensitive species and habitats:
3. Ranger Services and Ranging:
4. Green Health
5. Volunteer Cairngorms
6. Youth and Outdoor learning
7. Paths and trails

Within each of these areas a series of actions to be delivered over the next 5 years is being developed. These actions largely reflect work that is ongoing as well as additional work required to deliver the NPPP4 objectives already identified. As a partnership plan relevant partners will be identified.



Currently Park Authority staff are consulting key stakeholders on the actions required to deliver the NPP4 objectives. It is anticipated that a revised draft will be circulated for consultation in late September or early October with the CNPA Board adopting the plan at the end of November with publication in early 2024.



Annex 1- Draft Active Cairngorms Action Plan

Foreword -Park Authority board member

Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park is the largest National Park in the UK 4,528 sq km (6% of Scotland's land mass) and is home to one quarter of the UK's rare and endangered species. Around 18,000 people live in the National Park across the areas of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, Perth and Kinross, with two million visitors enjoying this special place every year. People have visited this special place for generations, attracted by the landscape, nature and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Strategic context

This document is the Active Cairngorms Action Plan for 2023 – 2028, and it sits within the wider context of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027. Launched in August 2022, the Partnership Plan sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues.

In particular, the Partnership Plan:

- Sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park.
- Guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park.
- Provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan.
- Is the Strategic Regional Land Use Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park.
- Is the Economic and Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the National Park.

The Partnership Plan is arranged in three sections: Nature, People and Place, with each section setting out the outcome that we want to achieve by 2045 (the year Scottish Government has committed to achieving net zero). Each of these sections is supported by a set of objectives, actions for the next five years and a comprehensive set of policies. The actions within the Active Cairngorms Action Plan add value to the National Park Partnership Plan.

Alongside this Active Cairngorms Action Plan sits a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan, which sets out a strategic approach to



investment in, and maintenance of, tourism and visitor infrastructure in the Cairngorms National Park. The Local Development Plan 2021 will guide the form of any built development and ensure it is in the right place. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan (still in development) will promote an economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms. Also in development is the Strategic Active Travel Plan, which will include a range of actions to influence how people travel to and around the National Park.

About this action plan

The Active Cairngorms Action Plan aims to make it easier and safer for people to enjoy the National Park's special qualities whatever their age, ability or background. It also encourages people to be more physically active and to learn about, care for and appreciate the National Park.

In excess of two million people visit the National Park every year. The provision of high-quality outdoor facilities and activities is vital to our tourism and is a major contributor to the National Park's economic success. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will help our visitors enjoy the National Park's special qualities in a sustainable way, safeguarding and protecting our most sensitive species and habits. For example, by identifying actions to reduce the impact of recreational disturbance on capercaillie, one of the most threatened species in UK, 85% of which reside in the National Park.

Suitable promotion of the wide range of recreational opportunities available in the National Park is key to influencing visitor behaviour and supporting wellbeing. Our aim is that people living in or visiting the National Park know the health benefits of physical recreation and are enabled, supported and inspired to be more active.

Through environmental volunteering we want people to engage with and feel part of the solution to safeguarding the National Park's special qualities against climate change and biodiversity loss.

Learning about the Cairngorms and its cultural and natural heritage will increase understanding and appreciation of the National Park. This will nurture an ethos of respect and a commitment to caring for the countryside that we live in, visit and work in.



Active Cairngorms Action Plan

Plan Structure

Aim- Our aim is for all residents and visitors to enjoy and use the National Park responsibly every day.

Nature

- A7: Reduce wildfire risk by developing an integrated wildfire management plan for the National Park
- A13: Ensure species thrive in the National Park with key assemblages across the Cairngorms within the semi-natural landscape.

People

- B9: Mental and physical health
- B10: A Park for All
- B11: Volunteering and outdoor learning

Place

- C5: Visitors to the National Park
- C7: Transport to and around the Park
- C8: Accessible path and cycle network
- C9: High-quality visitor experience
- C10: Cultural heritage

Key priorities

1. Managing for visitors
2. Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats
3. Ranger Services and rangers
4. Green Health
5. Volunteer Cairngorms
6. Youth and outdoor learning
7. Paths and trails

Monitoring



Priority actions

Seven priority areas for action have been identified for the Active Cairngorms Action Plan:

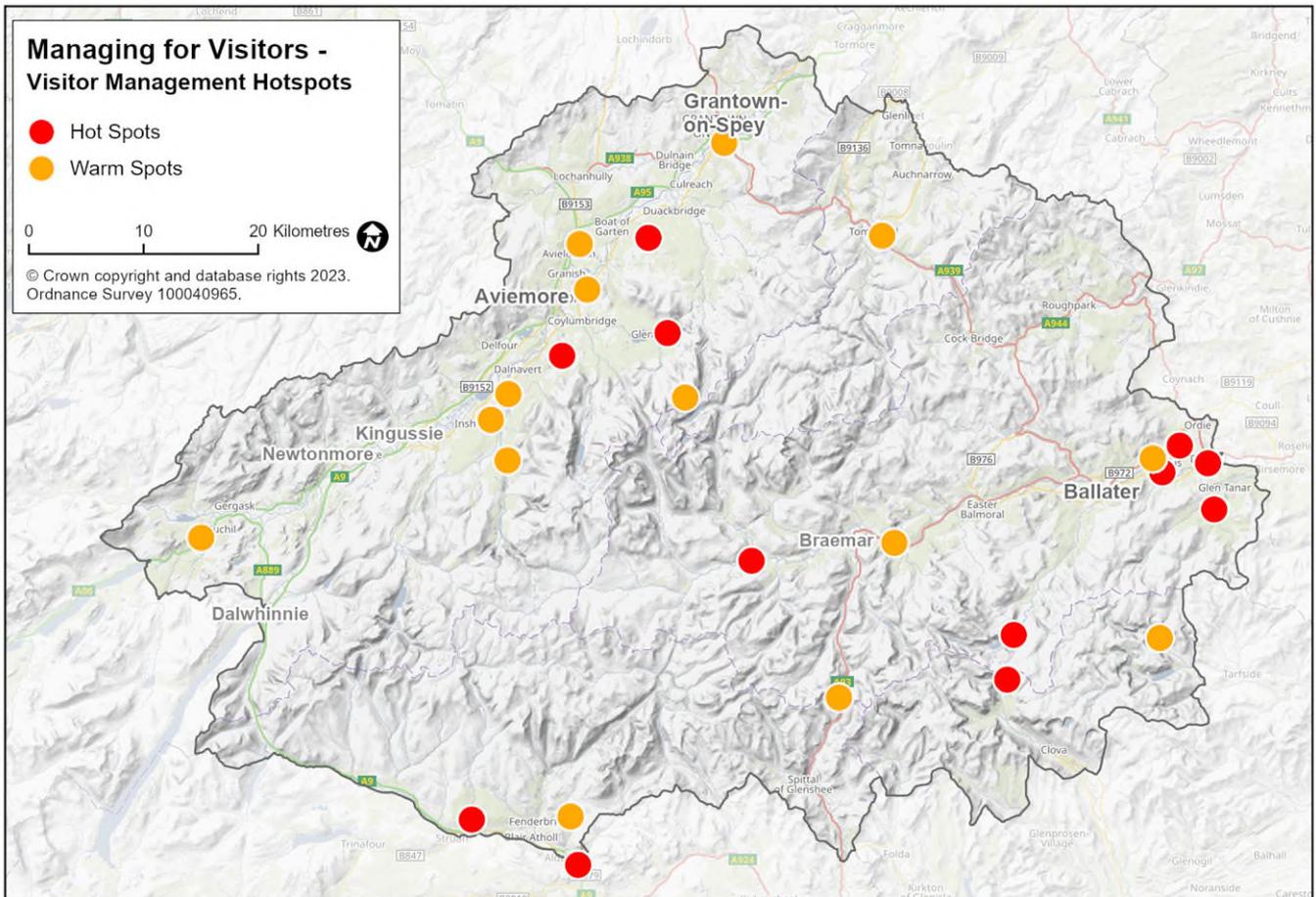
1. Managing for visitors
2. Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats
3. Ranger services
4. Green health
5. Volunteer Cairngorms
6. Youth and outdoor learning
7. Paths and trails

The key actions for each of these priorities are identified below, all of which will help to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan.

Managing for visitors

The pandemic years and those immediately after are unprecedented in terms of the changes that were seen in visitor distribution and behaviour in the National Park. A combination of circumstances, including the easing of lockdown policies and the desire of visitors to experience the outdoors and nature, put significant new pressures on certain locations in the National Park.

Areas of the National Park popular with visitors (see map 1) saw huge increases in visitor pressures and instances of anti-social behaviour. New arrangements for managing those sites for visitors and to minimise visitor impacts were put in place with partners during this time. This included an increase in rangers on the ground and coordinated awareness raising campaigns as well as significant investment in infrastructure.



Map 1- Visitor Management Hotspots

Looking ahead the ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Finding common ground between residents and visitors and minimising any potential conflicts.
2. Promote collaboration across estate and organisational boundaries to ensure a positive visitor experience.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Maintain the Managing for Visitors group that brings together public sector partners and landowners from key visitor destinations	CNPA



Provide clear guidance on recreational activities such as camping and barbecues	CNPA, SFRS, Managing for Visitors Group
Develop dedicated campaigns in partnership with CBP, the MfV group, national organisations on visitor behaviour e.g. roadside parking, toileting and overnight parking	CNPA, CBP, Managing for Visitors Group
Pilot habitat recovery measures at key visitor hotspots	
Develop management agreements and guidelines at key visitor hotspots and sensitive sites	CNPA, NatureScot, landowners
Promoted paths on key hotspots will be maintained to a high standard	
Investigate the viability of a visitor welcome app for the Cairngorms National Park, providing useful guidance to visitors and giving us real-time data on visitor distribution	CNPA
Develop standard signage for key messages promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code	
Continue to develop and promote 'tread lightly' as the main means to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in the National Park, including in accessible formats and different languages	
Support and develop a range of resources for land managers to promote responsible access on their land, including provision of land management signs, leaflets and posters	
Deliver a programme to support best practice within the land management sector on safeguarding access rights	
Provide guidance and support to land managers to reduce access obstructions	
Install people counters on key paths and car parks using real-time data to manage visitor pressures	

Case study- Managing for Visitors Group

This is the main operational group for the management for visitors within the Cairngorms National Park. It is attended by land managers from the public, private and third sectors, including local authorities, NatureScot and emergency services. The group meets every two weeks and is chaired by the Park Authority.



The success of this group is measured by the continuing partnership and collaboration on messaging, ranger deployment and innovative visitor management measures.

Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats

To ensure people and nature thrive together – and specifically to maintain viable populations of sensitive species such as capercaillie and safeguard fragile environments such as the core mountain areas – significant visitor management activity is required. This activity will focus on helping the public to engage positively with nature, while at the same time supporting quiet areas for nature to thrive.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Reduce recreational disturbance to priority sensitive species.
2. Reduce recreational impacts on priority sensitive habitats.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Develop and deliver “quiet areas for nature” See annex 1	CNPA, NatureScot
Develop best practice for the management of bikes – especially e-bikes – on sensitive sites, including the plateau	
Reduce the impact of recreation on ground-nesting birds such as capercaillie by implementing site-specific actions from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project legacy plan	
Develop and delivery “Dog Friendly Cairngorms” package for the National Park including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Creating and developing dog walking spaces in Badenoch and Strathspey, ideally in woodlands and accessible on foot from communities, to meet the needs of dogs and their owners away from sensitive areas for wildlife.▪ Build knowledge around capercaillie by developing an active community of dog owners in Badenoch and Strathspey with information and understanding at its heart.	



Update our outdoor access events guidance to support development of “quiet areas for nature”	
Work with wildlife and activity guides to develop a code of conduct for sensitive species and sites including twinflower and ground-nesting birds	

Case study – Trail Feathers project

In 2020, the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project conducted a survey with 388 mountain bikers within the Cairngorms National Park. The survey found that almost all felt responsible for the environment they ride in and were willing to change behaviours to help protect it.

In response to these findings, a group of over 20 riders from the Badenoch and Strathspey area came together to help turn this consensus into action and create a plan to help the mountain biking community enhance and protect the environment it utilises. The group of riders, who represent a range of riding abilities and interests and include bike shop owners, mountain bike guides and members of the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association, took part in a series of action planning workshops in early 2021.

Through this process the group have become more informed about capercaillie, have been able to identify potential solutions, and have agreed a goal and set of actions to help deliver wins for capercaillie and the mountain biking community. Their goal is to unlock at least 100 hectares of capercaillie habitat with no net loss of trails.

This goal and the actions to achieve it are known as the Trail Feathers project. The project is funded and facilitated by the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project and Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, with support from the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association.

Rangers and rangering

Rangers working in the National Park play a crucial role in helping people to understand, engage with and safeguard the natural and historic environment in places that people



Actions	Partners (lead first)
Coordinate use of public funds to assist in delivering a network of partner managed and Park Authority managed ranger services to ensure coverage across the whole National Park	
Develop a programme of training to support a committed and skilled workforce	
Promote the benefits of ranger services in addressing wider issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change as well as managing for visitors' activity	
Develop career pathways for people into rangering	

Case study

Green health

The natural environment of the National Park is a valuable resource when it comes to tackling some of our most pressing health issues. With an ageing population, more people with multiple health conditions, chronic illness and long-term mental health issues for living in the National Park, developing green health opportunities can help us respond to these pressures. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will demonstrate how nature-based solutions can make a meaningful and lasting difference to people's health and wellbeing.

Looking ahead the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Improving access to health-enhancing opportunities in nature.
2. Reducing inequalities through additional support for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Embed pathways to green health and nature within health, social care and education	NHS, Park Authority, local authorities



Maintain up-to-date information for green health opportunities and promote widely within communities	Park Authority, community green health networks
Nurture strong community networks that will provide, and support access to, recreational opportunities for wellbeing	Park Authority, local voluntary action hubs, community green health networks
Increase volunteering opportunities linked to green health activities, eg volunteer rangers, health walks, etc	Park Authority, Paths for All
Liaise with specific community support organisations to support particular groups, eg carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, seasonal workers, etc	Park Authority, community networks
Promote green health opportunities throughout the visitor information we provide	Park Authority
Support initiatives for active travel to access green health opportunities	Park Authority
Develop dementia-friendly walks in each community within the National Park	
Deliver a health walks programme	
Develop targeted promotion activities for those living sedentary lifestyles for example Green Health Week	

Case study

Volunteer Cairngorms

Volunteering delivers tangible benefits to the management of the National Park, as well as to the physical and mental wellbeing of those participating in volunteering. It also provides excellent training opportunities and experience for future employment. We want to see an expansion of the opportunities available for volunteering in the National Park, ensuring they are open to people from all backgrounds.

Looking ahead the overarching ambitions for this area of work is:

1. Increase the number of volunteer days spent caring for the National Park, taking an inclusive approach to volunteering recruitment.



2. Develop a world-class Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Ranger Service.
3. Raise awareness of existing environmental volunteering opportunities across the Cairngorms National Park.

Actions	Partners (lead first)
Increase the number of volunteer rangers to meet the needs of partners and the CNPA: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of recruitment programmes• Monitor and evaluate the demand and need of partners who provide opportunities for Volunteer Rangers:• Maintain high quality volunteer management.• Maintain and deliver high quality Volunteer Ranger Programme and monitor capacity of CNPA to deliver it.	CNPA
Develop and manage the Volunteer Experience Programme through liaising with specific community support organisations to support particular groups, eg. carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ and disability audiences, seasonal workers to access environmental volunteering opportunities	
Maintain and review the effectiveness the Volunteer Cairngorms portal	
Support a vibrant community of volunteer Health Walk Leader across the Park to deliver a Health Walk Programme	
Maintain awareness of environmental volunteering: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advertising opportunities through the Volunteer Cairngorms portal:• Developing a series of awareness?/ recruitment? events:• Promoting value of environmental volunteering through media outlets.	
Create a Cairngorms Litter Network, helping coordinate community-based litter picking and support relevant littering awareness campaigns	

Case study – volunteer experience programme



Volunteer Cairngorms supported 60-70 people, mostly single mothers, connected to the charity Home Start East Highland to come out and learn about conservation volunteering. The group spent time in the wildlife garden learning how to pond dip, build bug hotels and get to know the animals in the Highland Wildlife Park Home. Start East Highland work closely with families that have been referred through social work and are based in regions all over Scotland.

Young People and outdoor learning

Looking ahead the overarching ambitions for this area of work is:

1. Provide opportunities for inspiration, learning and understanding through engaging with people.
2. Provide opportunities for young people to have their voices heard on the future management of the National Park

Actions	Lead partners
Promote and manage the use of the John Muir Award in the National Park to promote and inspire young people	
Deliver Junior Ranger programmes to five local secondary schools	
Deliver monthly Junior Ranger activities in Badenoch and Strathspey and on Deeside	
Promote and manage the Cairngorms National Park education travel grant which supports school and other education groups to access the Park	
Develop and facilitate the Cairngorms Youth Action Team events programme	
Deliver Park Authority Ranger Service-led education sessions for all schools in the National Park	
Support continuing youth collaboration with other national parks, youth initiatives and events to share and celebrate best practice, eg. through EUROPARC or Youth Parliament events	
Collaborating with other public sector partners on national education initiatives.	



Case study Junior Ranger

Paths and trails

High quality, accessible paths are at the heart of our National Park and help underpin our reputation for quality as a National Park. Since the National Park's designation in 2003, we have built our access network in partnership with land managers who have been maintaining and developing paths. Our unique path network underpins the National Park's profile as a quality tourism destination, tackles health inequalities, supports active lifestyles and active travel and connects people with nature.

Looking ahead the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

1. Community path networks will cater for a wide range of users.
2. Community path networks will be well promoted to wide range of audiences.

Actions	Lead partners	Partnership Plan objectives
Review and publish an updated core paths plan by???		
Develop a more robust data-gathering tool(s) as a basis for path investment		
Maintain a suite of community path leaflets		
Develop online promotion of community paths		
Ensure paths around communities are signposted and waymarked across the National Park, upgrading signage where necessary		
Install, update and replace community path network map and interpretation boards		
Improve the quality and accessibility of community path networks by supporting community path groups		
Implement a targeted visitor monitoring programme through the strategic review of existing monitoring at indicator sites (lowland paths, upland paths,		



trailheads, core paths and Long Distances Routes) with additional monitoring to be carried out where gaps are identified		
Develop innovative techniques to reduce upland path erosion		
Maintain priority upland paths		
Expand the existing 'adopt a path' scheme to cover all mountain paths in the Park		
Review and update the upland path audit to identify investment priorities for the upland path network		

Case study

Monitoring and review

It is important that our work is specific and measurable. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will be reviewed annually following the collection of baseline data.

What	Data	Outcome