



For information

Title: Sustainable Tourism Action Plan Annual Update

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Purpose

To update the board on delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2022-27 and give wider context on associated policy and research.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note progress on delivery of the 2023-2027 Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, and timeline for development of the next Sustainable Tourism Action Plan.

Strategic context

1. In 2022 the Board approved the five-year Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP). The actions within the STAP set out the contribution of the wider tourism industry to the delivery of relevant NPPP4 objectives, as well contributing to Scotland Outlook 2030, the national tourism strategy. Oversight of the STAP lies with the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership (CTP), currently chaired by Park Authority Board member, Jackie Brierton. Delivery of the actions within the plan are carried out by a range of partners, who have all contributed to the compilation of this annual review of progress as detailed in Annex 1. As well as updating on progress, the CTP were given the opportunity to carry out a mid-term review of the actions and advise on any necessary changes. Only minor changes in wording were suggested.
2. The development and delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and STAP is the primary basis for accreditation with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (the Charter) which the Cairngorms National Park has held continuously since 2005, significantly contributing to our



international reputation. The development of the next STAP, covering the period 2028-32, will commence in 2027 on completion of NPPP5 development.

Strategic policy consideration

3. While the STAP details our priorities for delivery at a local and regional level, there are some industry developments that are worth noting.
 - a) **The Glenmore and Abernethy wildfire:** The wildfire that affected Glenmore and Abernethy in July and August 2026 has seriously impacted visitor numbers and spend in the affected areas at the busiest time of year, with knock-on implications for the economy of the wider area. Work to assess and mitigate the impacts is continuing.
 - b) **Visitor Levy consultations:** Local authorities continue to consider implementation of a visitor levy, and the Park Authority is involved in those discussions where relevant. At the current time, both Perth and Kinross Council and Highland Council have live consultations on their proposals. The earliest date any visitor levy could be implemented is mid-2028.

Key Areas of Activity

4. A full update on delivery across all actions is contained in Annex 1, but there are a few key areas to note.
 - a) **Reducing Seasonality:** The Marketing campaign 'Where Winter Comes to Life' has now run for four years, funded by the Park Authority and delivered by the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP). Visitor data for the period shows that the strongest growth in visitor days and economic impact have been over the traditionally quieter winter period, helping support year-round employment and better spreading visitor pressure outwith the busy summer months. Funding has again been made available for the campaign for Winter 2026/27.
 - b) **Cultural heritage:** There has been significant progress in the support and promotion of cultural heritage within the National Park with a second cultural heritage networking event planned for October 2026, and further funding available for cultural heritage projects.
 - c) **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion:** Data from the 2024/5 visitor survey flagged a drop in visitors from lower income backgrounds. Following discussions with the Equality Advisory Panel, this audience will be a focus for



activity to identify and address barriers to visitation. The wider cost of living crisis is likely to make this work challenging but even more important.

Research and monitoring

5. We continue to commission and monitor a range of research to track key industry trends and assess progress against NPPP indicators.
 - a) **Visitor Volume and Value:** The latest data from the STEAM model indicates that 2025 saw 2.6 million visits, 5 million visitor days and an estimated £522 million economic impact from the visitor economy, a modest increase on 2024 figures.
 - b) **Visitor and Resident Surveys:** The next wave of the Cairngorms Visitor Survey will run from November 2026 until October 2027, with a mix of face-to-face interviews and online surveys as in the previous 2024/5 survey. In addition, we plan to add some more qualitative work on the experience of visitors on lower incomes to identify barriers to visitation amongst these audiences. The second wave of the resident and worker survey is likely to launch in late 2027.
 - c) **Business Sentiment:** The Cairngorms Business Barometer now runs twice a year instead of quarterly. The Spring survey showed a dip in long-term business confidence, with businesses flagging issues with bureaucracy, costs, and staffing, and raising concerns about future visitor levy legislation.

Next Steps

6. As part of the European Charter re-accreditation process a final review of delivery will be carried out in 2027, alongside the development of the next STAP covering the period 2028 – 2032.

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