



## For decision

**Title:** Core Paths Plan Review – formal consultation

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### Purpose

Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (the Act) obliges all access authorities to “draw up a plan for a system of paths (“core paths”) sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area.” The Park Authority has previously produced a Core Paths Plan for this purpose in 2015.

Section 20 of the Act requires that the Park Authority must review the plan adopted under section 18 if Ministers require them to do so, and or may review such a plan if they consider it appropriate to do so for the purpose of ensuring that the Core Paths Plan continues to give the public reasonable access throughout their area. The Park Authority has received a ministerial direction to review its Core Paths Plan.

Section 18 of the Act also obliges the access authority to make a draft plan available for public inspection for a period of not less than 12-weeks. This report and its associated annexes provide Board members with officer’s recommendations on changes to the previous plan through their inclusion in the draft plan and seek Board approval to commence the public consultation on the draft plan.

### Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Approve a formal public consultation on the draft Core Paths Plan.



## Strategic context

1. Section C8 of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) - “Accessible path and cycle network” includes the objective “improve path, cycle and outdoor access networks to give outstanding opportunities to experience the natural and cultural heritage of the National Park to the widest range of people, while minimising disturbance to vulnerable species, habitats and sites.” Reviewing and updating the Core Paths Plan to bring it up to date with wider developments, the inclusion of newly built paths and to reflect changed public expectations is an important part of developing this network. This takes on additional relevance as funding for path improvements is largely focussed on those paths defined as “core paths”.
2. Section 38 of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan sets out an action to review and publish an update Core Paths Plan. This action set an expectation that the updated Core Paths Plan would be published in 2026. Given that the existing plan is at least 10-years old it was agreed that the review should take the form of an informal consultation followed by the formal statutory consultation. Introducing this additional step means that the plan is more likely to be adopted and published in 2027.

## Strategic policy consideration

3. Board members are reminded that section 20 of the Act also gives powers to Scottish Ministers to direct the Park Authority to review its Core Paths Plan. Such a direction was received on the 24 July 2024. Explicit in this direction was a requirement to review whether any core paths crossed the mainline railway via a private level crossing.
4. Whilst the Park Authority was directed to review its Core Paths Plan, no specific reference was made as to when this should be done. In view of the action in the Active Cairngorms Action Plan to “Review and publish an updated Core Paths Plan by end of 2026” officers considered 2025/26 as being an appropriate time to undertake this review. This would mean the review of the Core Paths Plan would likely conclude before the consultation and adoption of the next NPPP. However, as the current NPPP already includes the objective of improving path, cycle and outdoor access networks and as the adoption of the Core Paths Plan is not



anticipated to have a significant impact on the detail of the next NPPP this timing is considered appropriate.

## **Review of the current Core Path Plan**

5. Taking direction both from Ministers and from the Active Cairngorms Action Plan, the Access Team undertook a review of the Core Paths Plan. This review identified a number of suggested amendments based on changes to the network on the ground, priorities with the NPPP4 and its associated action plans and well as the published community action plans.
6. The public were invited to comment on these amendments via an informal consultation that ran over three months from the 29 May to 31 August 2025. A summary of the informal consultation process, engagements and feedback can be found in the summary report in Annex 1.
7. All the feedback and comments received during the informal consultation have been reviewed and assessed by the Access team, with the Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) consulted as required.

## **Matters arising from the informal consultation**

8. During the informal consultation suggestions were received to both designate additional routes as core paths (40 paths suggested) and to de-designate core paths (10 suggestions).
9. A number of themes emerged from the informal consultation as being the most popular matters of interest by volume of responses. Whilst not exhaustive these are best summarised as:
  - a) The Tulloch Moor Track
  - b) Glenmore - Allt Mor path from Glenmore to Cairngorm Mountain
  - c) Aviemore to Carrbridge proposed non-motorised user route
  - d) Private level crossings
10. A review was also undertaken by the access team of all core paths on classified roads (A and B class roads) which considered the appropriateness and safety of these routes.



11. The outcomes and the Park Authority's position on these matters is presented in the issues report (Annex 2). Changes to reflect the decisions made have been incorporated into the Draft Plan.
12. The updates to the Core Paths Plan have increased the amount of core paths from 693 miles (2015) to 710 miles (2026) - an overall gain of an additional 17 miles of core paths.

### **Strategic risk management**

13. There are no new risk implications arising from the public consultation on the draft Core Paths Plan itself. However, there are risks post-consultation on the timetable for adoption. It is uncertain how many objections may be received however steps, including undertaking the informal consultation were taken to mitigate this risk.
14. If objections remain unresolved then they have to be submitted to Ministers alongside the draft plan. In addressing these objections Ministers may appoint a Reporter to undertake an inquiry. The timetable for such being dictated by the Reporters Unit.

### **Supporting information**

- Annex 1 – Informal consultation summary report
- Annex 2 – Issues report
- Annex 3 - Core Paths Plan maps – set of 15 maps

**Colin Simpson**

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