



Final Report



**Cairngorms National Park
Authority, Cairngorms Business
Partnership and Sportscotland**

Developing Cycling in the Cairngorms National Park

**Report of initial workshop for
stakeholders**

The Lecht, Thursday 1st November 2012

Rocket Science UK Ltd
November 2012

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1 Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park is a popular destination for all kinds of cyclists, including touring, road, mountain biking and family leisure cyclists. In addition there has been a lot of work done in communities across the Park to encourage residents to cycle more, through the creation of safe local routes to school and links between communities.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority, the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) and Sportscotland with the support of the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourist Forum (CSTF) and the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF), identified a need to take forward work looking at a strategic approach to cycling in the CNP. A paper was presented to the Cairngorms Local Access Outdoor Forum on 21st August which described the policy context to this and raised a number of issues for the Forum's consideration.

One outcome of this discussion was to arrange a workshop for all interested parties to provide a springboard for the production of an action plan for cycling in the Park. This was held at The Lecht on 1st November 2012 and attracted a wide range of interests including representatives of cycling interest groups, landowners, local businesses, and the key development agencies (see Appendix 1 for workshop participants). The event was independently facilitated by Richard Scothorne of Rocket Science.

The event was preceded by a widely distributed electronic survey which provided a range of insights and perspectives to inform discussion on the day. This survey asked for views about:

- The main strengths of the Park for cycling
- The main weaknesses of the Park in terms of cycling
- The opportunities for developing cycling
- The benefits of a coordinated approach...
- The main challenges in taking forward a strategic approach
- The top priorities for action.

We present the key findings of the workshop in Section 2 on page 2.

The event itself was structured around two tasks:

- Developing a vision for the future of cycling in the Park and reflecting on the practical implications of this.
- Developing initial ideas about the practical action that needs to be taken – by whom and over what timescales – in order to achieve this vision.

In Section 4 on page 10 we present the vision that was produced on the day, and in Section 5 on page 13 we set out an initial draft action plan for further refinement by the key parties.

2 Summary of key points from workshop

- In terms of assets and appeal for cyclists, the Park has a lot going for it, in terms of landscape, location and existing tracks and routes. There is a lot to build on to create a world class place for cycling.
- The focus of action should not be on developing new assets but on joining up what already exists in terms of:
 - Routes
 - Agendas: Sports, health, economic and social development
 - Interests groups and agencies
 - Communities: home, school and work.
- The approach should be evolutionary. There is a need to manage and sustain what already exists and develop only what can be sustained in the future.
- There should be active management of those areas that are suitable for cycling. It is appropriate to build on the existing 'hotspots', help to reduce the use of sensitive areas for cycling and to minimise potential conflicts by the identification of preferred 'zones', investment in areas and assets where conflict is minimised, promoting areas and routes where use is sustainable, and influencing those who influence where cyclists go.
- The focus of a strategy should therefore be on long term sustainability and manageability:
 - We won't develop beyond our capacity to maintain
 - We will make what we have work well and provide a great experience
 - We will have a strong focus on good information – about routes/appropriate use/grading.
- The aim will be to create a high quality experience in the round – for all cyclists.
- The target 'market' will be both visitors and local residents.
- A framework will be created for well informed community based initiatives and activity. Community ownership of local development is a vital principle and volunteers have a significant role to play in taking forward any strategy to make the Cairngorms a world class resource for cyclists.
- Responsible behaviours will be encouraged – as part of a much wider national and international effort – and as part of the implementation of the Outdoor Access Code.

3 Survey results

An electronic survey was distributed to all those invited to the workshop. A total of 59 responses were returned with different numbers completing each question.

What are the main strengths of the Park for cycling?

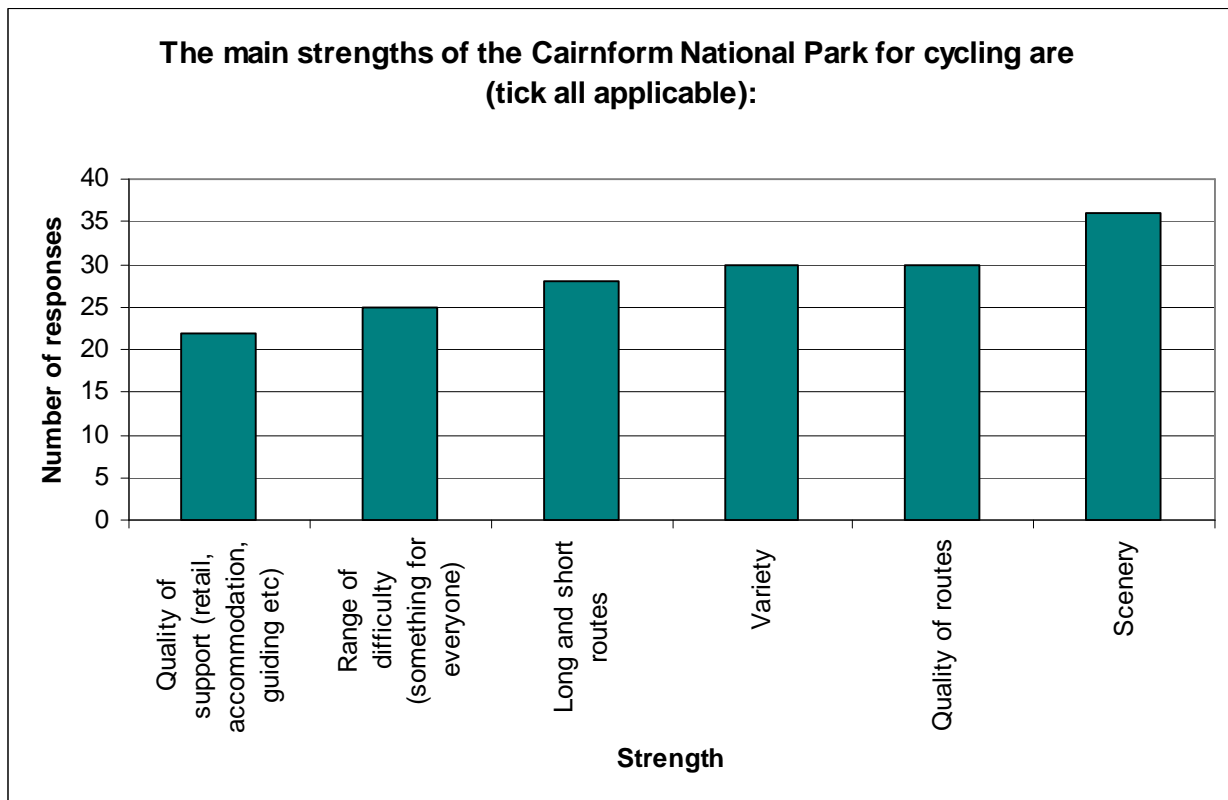


Figure 1: Main strengths of the Park for Cycling [Source: Rocket Science survey]

The main strengths were seen as the scenery and the quality and variety of routes available.

Respondents volunteered a range of other strengths:

*"The presence of a '**scene**' - many loose communities of people with skill and enthusiasm relating to biking."*

*"**Accessibility**, particularly in comparison with other mountain areas."*

*"...Cycling in areas largely **unspoilt by housing, industrial and recreational/ tourist developments**... Minimal signage and man made intrusions in the natural landscape... Most routes are not developed as cycle-routes, giving folk a sense of self-reliance and general route-awareness when cycling off-road."*

"Real off-road '**wild**' cycling, with great through routes."

"**Safe, family cycling.**"

"National Cycle Route 7 runs through the park north to south. Potential to develop the Speyside Way as a promoted cycle route."

"Aviemore provides a **good central hub for all types of cyclists.**"

What are the main weaknesses of the Park for cycling?

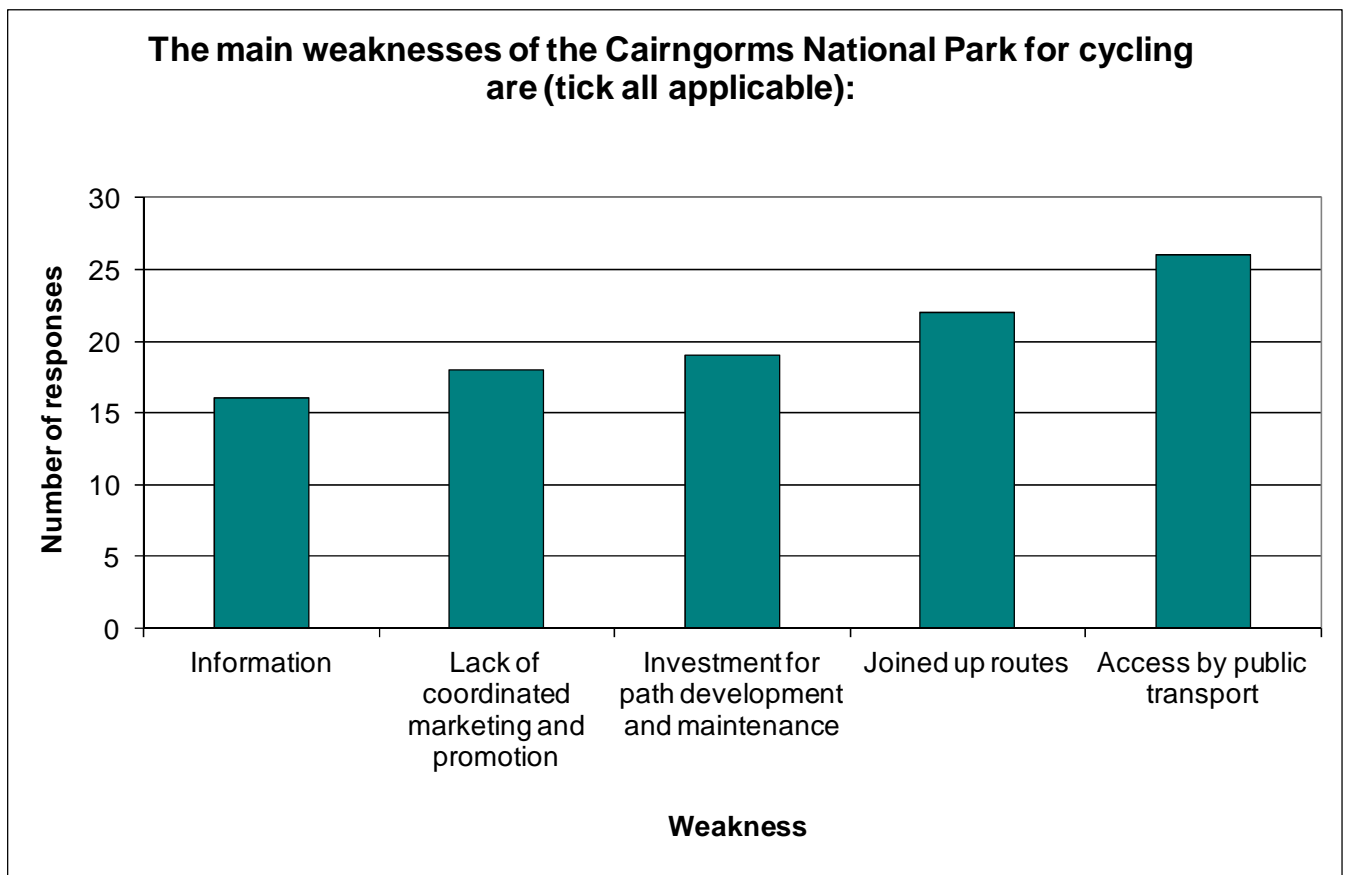


Figure 2: Main weaknesses of the Park for Cycling [Source: Rocket Science survey]

The main weaknesses were identified as poor public transport access (cf with private car access which tended to be seen as a strength), a lack of joined up routes and a lack of coordinated marketing/information.

Respondents volunteered a range of comments:

"...The potential **impact of increased cycling on other users' enjoyment**, particularly in more **remote locations** and those areas important for wildlife and quiet enjoyment...
The **lack of a strategic approach** to/recognition of these potential conflicts."

*"**Price** - it is an expensive day out for a family... Few (if any) bike only paths... Have to share routes with (sometime aggressive) dog walkers... The name of the route does not reflect the degree of difficulty."*

*"... Lack of awareness of SOAC and cycling code by MTBs causes **conflict** as all paths are shared. Evidence of **displacement of older and disabled walkers** because of irresponsible MTB users. Lack of awareness of creation of the path network to enable responsible enjoyment of Natura site and sensitive habitats and **lack of awareness of Leave No Trace principles** leads to irresponsible behaviour... Using **misleading marketing** - images of extreme and fanatics which gives wrong impression of the facilities and experience."*

"Lack of appropriate and effective signing for cyclists – they are different from walkers and we need to understand cyclists' needs."

*"Not so easy to find **overview information on cycle routes** through CNP website; information across different sites, e.g., VisitScotland.com. From personal experience of visiting the area, maps of cycle routes are available from Rothiemurchus Estates and from bike hire companies, but no overall map, showing the full extent of cycling possibilities in area, that I can recall."*

What are the most important opportunities for developing cycling in the Park?

A wide range of opportunities were identified. The main opportunities cited were:

- Using the current **high profile of cycling** to encourage cycling and spread its **popularity** to other places in the region, whilst also promoting **safe cycling** in villages nearby (11 responses)
- **Linking up cycling routes** and developing new ones, and combining this with other **cycling-friendly measures**, including accommodation and transport (10 responses)
- Adopting a **coordinated approach** between different stakeholders in the area, such as families, schools, clubs, facility providers, businesses, and using this to host **events and promote cycling holidays** in the area (6 responses)
- Adopting a targeted **marketing and publicity programme** for cycling, with improvements to the **information** provided for users (6 responses)

Related comments included:

*"Demonstrating (then growing) the contribution cycling makes to the **social and economic wellbeing** of CNP residents and visitors..."*

"A **proper grading system** for: 1 downhill routes, 2 touring routes, 3 realistic times and grades of difficulty - no one with any bike skill or fitness should grade or time the routes - these should be set by 'Joe Average'"

"Identifying **target markets and providing suitable publicity**; developing Cycling holidays with local businesses; encouraging more local journeys within park to be by bike"

"A **joined up approach** between the local schools, the community clubs and the facility providers i.e CNPA, Forestry Commission, Land Owners etc."

"The **high profile** of cycling at the moment. Health benefits - low impact exercise..."

What would be the most important benefits of having a coordinated approach for developing cycling?

- By far the most common theme for this question was the **need for effective partnership working** and a collaborative, **strategic approach** between different stakeholders in order to define and meet common **objectives**, channel **resources** and leverage **funding** (10 responses).
- Related to this, was the benefit of **promoting the CNP as a key site for cycling** through a coordinated/ marketing/ promotional campaign (7 responses).
- Having **wider benefits to businesses** in the area and promoting **tourism** by raising the profile of the Cairngorms also received 4 responses, as did the benefit of being able to agree on **specific routes and joined up/ park-wide access arrangements**

Among the specific comments were:

"Huge **increase in business** all round raising the profile of the Cairngorms as a quality cycling destination to rival 7 Stanes."

"Currently **no effective institutional representation or participation** of cycling interests and knowledgeable people in the **relevant business, access, and institutional forums**. Previous actions – where possible – tend to be piecemeal and ineffective...A **strategic approach** is needed to enable the collaboration of the right people and pooling and channelling of necessary resources."

"The Park area will become even more distinguished as a **mountain bike centre**."
 "By employing a coordinated approach it will help bring interested public bodies and local businesses to work towards **common set of objectives**."

*"Consistent **message**, strengthened **pathways**, better **information sharing**."*

*"**Health and Well being** - Physical, emotional and mental health benefits."*

*"More people **attracted** to the National Park for cycling. Greater **awareness of opportunities** would entice cyclists and their friends and families to **stay longer** in the Park."*

*"**Increased opportunities for local businesses** to benefit from current high interest in Cycling. Could work with local communities and businesses on development of plans to encourage engagement. More efficient **use of resources and pooling of ideas**."*

What are the main challenges that need to be resolved?

- The main perceived challenges related to **conflicts over cyclists' use of the paths** and the need for wider consultation (9 responses)
- Closely related to this was the **need to get estate owners and land managers to work together**, and integrate cycling with other uses (8 responses)
- There were also issues raised about **self-interest** between different parties, and other issues relating to the **budgets** and **funding streams** (7 interests)
- Other issues related to the need to **balance increased use with environmental impact** (4), the need for more clearly **defined cycle routes** (3), the lack of **public transport** serving the area (2), the need for appropriate **maps and guides** that people can understand (2), the need for a coordinated approach to **marketing/ promotion** (1), **environmental issues/ threats/ pressures** (1), and the need to embed cycling as a mode for locals (1).

Among the specific responses were:

*"Getting the various estates and landowners to work together producing maps and guides that cover a wider area. Getting **maps and guides** that the lay person can understand. Using **new technology** for guides and maps (smart phones apps etc)"*

*"The **balance** between increasing number and preserving the environment and good will of landowners."*

*"**Ensuring that all stakeholders are consulted fully** and their suggestions and concerns are fully discussed. This will be essential **to resolve and prevent existing tensions** between individuals and businesses. Mountain Biking and land owners and managers of the areas where biking does or might take place."*

"The assumption some people have that mountain biking and conservation are incompatible. The way some estates discourage mountain biking. New path work that doesn't take mountain bikers into consideration."

What should be the top priorities for action?

- An extremely wide range of priorities were mentioned, with the most common cited being the need for a development of cycling routes and networks and maps to accompany these (8 responses).
- Other common responses including the promotion and marketing of the CNP/ cycling (7), the need for a meeting/ consultation and the agreement of actions (4), the need to develop a strategic partnership and discussion (3), the need to identify and develop a target market (3), the need to develop family-friendly opportunities (3) and the need to establish codes of practice and guidelines, especially for the environment (3)
- Other priorities mentioned once or twice were the need to prioritise safety, reaching under-represented groups, the need to zone areas that are appropriate for cycling use, the need to identify the scope and opportunity for cycling as a outdoor user group and demonstrating the social/ economic wellbeing of users.

Conclusions

- The survey highlighted a clear desire from respondents to develop cycling in the Cairngorms National Park and a strong sense of the range of benefits this would bring: economic, social and health.
- However, it will require effective partnership working and a collaborative, strategic approach between different stakeholders to define common objectives, channel resources and leverage funding, thereby addressing current weaknesses, including confusion over appropriate cycle routes and signage and conflicts of use in the area.
- There is a need for clarity about target markets and associated and appropriate marketing, promotion and development
- A key area for development is the production of information and maps about routes and connections – while providing plenty of opportunities for cyclists to 'do their own thing'.
- Any development will need to balance conflicts between different users and interests in the area.

- There is a need to manage environmental impact and retain wild experience.
- There are issues around access and inclusion which should be amenable to coordinated action.
- Consultation and discussion are required to take plans forward and ensure wide ownership of and commitment to any emerging plan of action.
- There is a lot of good practice around – we are not starting from a blank sheet and there is significant scope for local learning and dissemination.

4 Vision

Participants worked in groups to identify shared ambitions for cycling in the Cairngorms National Park 5 years time (ie in 2017). These were developed under six headings:

- Strategy
- Marketing, promotion and information
- Development and investment
- Access and inclusion
- Conflict resolution
- Local participation.

In the rest of this section we present the common themes that emerged under these headings.

Strategy

In 2017:

- There is a Partnership Cycling Development Plan being implemented which involves communities, businesses, local authorities, public bodies. This was built on a common visions for cycling in the Cairngorms and links to other strategies and is reviewed every year.
- The National Park is recognised as the premier place for cycling in the UK and there is a strong cycling culture, with cycling integrated into everyday life
- There is safe, sustainable, accessible cycling – for all ages and abilities - across the Park
- We have designed and embedded codes and associated education

Marketing, promotion and information

In 2017:

- We have centralised and coordinated the marketing of information about cycling (printed and digital)
- There are Guidebooks and route maps for Cairngorms and local areas with overarching theme ('family' of publications) – cf golf, hostelling – and with clear and appealing branding/logo
- There is a sensitive signage scheme for most routes with destinations, distances and gradings.
- We have made our 'Cyclists welcome' approach obvious and meaningful
- There are a wide range of bike focused events and cycling competition attracting both locals and visitors.
- We have a strong focus on attracting children and young people to all forms of cycling
- There are Guides who offer experience at all levels for all groups
- The images we use in promotion are appropriate to our target markets.
- We have helped all our communities construct information boards and bike racks.

Development and investment

In 2017:

- We have developed a well maintained integrated network operating at different levels
- We have aligned and complementary budgets for development and maintenance
- There are safe routes to all schools in the Park – primary and secondary
- All communities and key attractions joined up by off road trails
- We have helped most communities develop skills and 'pump tracks' and play facilities
- Trails and cycle routes are maintained to a standard that encourages use
- Accommodation is 'bike friendly'
- Public transport is bike friendly – most buses have racks/trailers and trains have bike racks/guards van.
- There are donation boxes for maintenance at car parks and route intersections.
- We have developed a wide range of events to generate income
- We have integrated cycling into development planning and made use of planning gain opportunities to join up and develop routes.
- There is a designated % of budget from Local Authorities towards maintenance for active travel.

Access and inclusion

In 2017:

- We are reaping the benefits of starting our approach within each communities, to school, in playgrounds – make cycling part of everyone's life
- There is a wide range of high quality routes – smooth, fast, circular – and a suite of route types in and around each community
- All age groups, abilities and economic groups are cycling
- Everyone has access to bikes
- There is an incentive scheme which helps all groups to access cycling
- There is an inclusive cycling culture in the Park
- There are no locked gates or other barriers to access.
- There are a wide range of outlets for bike rental and sale – including electric bike rental and sales
- There are great public transport links to key starting points (eg use of intermediate transport like community minibus)
- We encourage all self-propelled wheel users – eg skateboard, blades, roller skis

Shared understanding (Conflict resolution)

In 2017:

- We have developed a range of technical tools for land managers to help them minimise conflict and respond effectively when it arises
- We have introduced the Cairngorms Cycling Code – which is written in a positive way (ie focusing on what you can do rather than what you can't do)

- We have identified preferred locations/zones for cycling development and encouragement
- We have encouraged and supported local volunteers and volunteer networks
- We have provided access to professional mediation to help the resolution of the worst areas of conflict
- We have ensured that we are carefully managing 'desire lines' to recognise practical behaviour while avoiding the damage this can cause
- We have promoted 'Do the Ride Thing' as part of a much wider campaign to support mutually respectful behaviour by cyclists and other path users.
- We have protected quiet roads that provide great cycling
- We have embedding environmental awareness into our mountain biking culture
- We have encouraged a 'French road drivers' attitude to bikes
- We have sustained a 'Bells, thanks and appropriate speed' campaign
- We have supported appropriate dedicated paths in appropriate places to minimise conflict
- We have created a standing Forum to bring people and interests together to resolve issues

Local participation

In 2017:

- We have a Cycle to School Development Plan and network for each community
- We have significantly increased local participation – for leisure, work, school, shopping etc: 90% of local people are participating in cycling and 50% of all children cycling to and from school
- We have helped local communities develop cycle friendly villages and have achieved our target of the first three in place
- We have developed a strong cadre of volunteers across the Park to promote and maintain and highlight missing links
- We have ensured that communities are strongly represented in our discussions on developing cycling in the Park
- We have developed and implemented a robust pathway from fun to sporting excellence
- We have a comprehensive approach to encouraging young Park residents to become involved in cycling – including more local competitions
- CNPA have introduced 'cycle friendly' badge scheme for local businesses and facilities and schools.

5 Developing our strategy

Participants developed an initial draft outline strategy under the 'vision' headings set out in the previous section.

In the following pages we set out their ideas on appropriate action. The statements in **red** were identified as priority actions.

Strategy

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
Who?	CNPA, CBP, LAs, Health, Land managers, Cycling Scotland (national and local), Sustrans, Sportscotland			
What?	Written document setting out short (quick wins, medium (5 years) and long term (10 – 25 years) actions Develop clear vision of a sustainable cycling culture			
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit of cycling provision, facilities, businesses (quick and dirty) • Compare against vision • Develop themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Using Lecht Action Plan ◦ Who to influence outside the Park • Engagement: options/Draft Strategy/Cycling Stakeholders Group plus non-attendees/Community Councils/CBP and Members/LOAF and STF 			
When?	Sign off: Cycling Stakeholders Group and then CNPA Board Keep momentum/by end April 2013/Funding			
Where?	Cairngorms National Park focus but ensure long distance links through to adjacent areas and key cycling locations.			

Marketing, promotion and information

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
Market research	Knowing customers: Audit of product (baseline)		Immediate	
Marketing and PR campaign	Digital, PR, print Park Portal – Web page: internal and external resource – signpost other sites 'Route adviser' – quality product, search by settlements, rate types etc. Involve estates. Print media. Noticeboards/signage Develop all year events programme			

Development and investment

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
<i>Establish baseline</i>	What do we have? Mapping exercise (using OAS review): the players, the routes, the support and facilities			
<i>Development priorities to encourage young people</i>	Safe routes to all schools in all villages Pump tracks and play facilities in villages Bike Officer for the CNPA Identify key points at which people start and stop biking			
<i>Developing key assets</i>	Plugging gaps in routes Road bike 'King of the Mountains' – identifying and promoting iconic road hills Mapping sustainable existing routes Sustrans routes – investing in improvements and maintenance			
<i>Developing infrastructure</i>	Encouraging and promoting support infrastructure: Bike hire Bike racks Electric bike hire Incentivise public transport to introduce bike racks Source good practice from elsewhere Develop sources of funding for investment: Donation scheme Car parking schemes Visitor payback Build and support volunteer effort for maintenance.			

Access and inclusion

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
'Provision for all'	Revisit Core Paths Plan – meet communities needs, cycling and walking (existing or new routes – barrier free)			
	Build on Curriculum for Excellence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary – on/off road cycling proficiency • Secondary – on/off road journey (Draw on local sponsors/active schools) 			
	Infrastructure – transport: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure on Scotrail – to increase bike capacity on trains • 'Bike Taxis' – local transport support network • Bikes racks in communities 			
	Events (HWB) – personal challenge (introduce to area)			
	Cultural, expectations, awareness, behaviour (Best practice, other models, different countries)			

Shared understanding (Conflict resolution)

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
<i>Education strategy for all users</i>	Education of instructors/Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access – general • Access – local • Leave no trace and OAC Landowners providing education sessions and information Encourage guided activity	Need to create a well led (facilitated?) group of key stakeholders to take all these actions forward: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landowners • Users/customers • Providers • Mappers • Communities 	Create Group and first actions in place by end of 2013	
<i>Consider a spatial approach</i> (Develop zoning scheme)	Encourage cycling in low sensitivity areas or areas frequented by other types of users Avoid promotion of areas or routes which are environmentally sensitive			
<i>Develop maps and apps</i>	Use to minimise conflict in terms of environmental sensitivity and/or other users.			
<i>Develop trailhead villages</i>				
<i>Create a clear and supported grading system</i>	Should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surface • Gradient • Duration of route • Facilities available/accessible • Bike type • Other users likely... • Environmental sensitivity • Wild land experience 			

Local participation

Theme	Action	Lead	Timescale	Comment
Cycle friendly villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit existing infrastructure by community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clubs ○ After-school groups ○ Volunteers and 'champions' ○ Businesses ○ Active travel plans • Develop an action plan with each community 	Key stakeholders plus CPP, CNPA	3 – 5 years	
Increasing local participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Recreation • Cycle to work/shops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local route infrastructure (and speed limits) • Incentive schemes – bike to school scheme • Safe cycling • Education in schools – bike ability • Develop bike shelters and remove obstacles • Create events and taster sessions to support a culture shift 	HLH/Sportscotland, Local Authority	5 years	
Creation of Pathways from fun to excellence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health agenda • Sport agenda 	Develop 'pump tracks' and skills areas in communities Ensure ease of access into cycling and easy transition between disciplines Promote health benefits of cycling Support local clubs (eg through coaching qualifications)	LA/Scottish Cycling HLH Health Board	3 – 4 years	

Appendix: Workshop participants

Alan Rankin	Cairngorms Business Partnership	Willie McKenna	CNPA Board
Colin Simpson	Highland Council	David Keegan	Bothy Bikes
Bob Kinnaird	Glenmore Lodge	Scott Porteous	Cairngorm Mountain LTD
Jeremy Roberts	RSPB	Julian Orsi	Rothiemurchus Estate
Kate Campbell	SUSTRANS	Katherine Taylor	SUSTANS
Katrina Brown	James Hutton Institute	Kevin Robertson	FCS
Lorna Crane	Grantown Grammar School	Megan Griffiths	Sport Scotland
Philippa Grant	Rothiemurchus Estate	Bob Grant	CNPA
Murray Ferguson	CNPA	Fran Potheary	CNPA
Cattie Anderson	SNH	Lindsey Carruthers	Basecamp
Andy Bateman	Scot Mountain Holidays	Brian Cargill	Perth and Kinross Council
Hammy Morison	Loch Morlich	Pete Holden	National Trust for Scotland
Bridget Finton	SNH	Darren Reid	Highlife Highland
Eric Baird	Glen Tanar Estate	Robin Jackson	Laggan Forest Trust
Ian Douglas	Moray Council	John Mason	Full on Adventure
Mike Dukes	Atholl Estate	Polly Freeman	Atholl Estate
Miles Fuller	Highlife Highland	Richard Scothorne	Rocket Science
Graeme McLean	Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland		
George Reid	Highland Council (based at Badaguish)		