
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Sustainable Tourism Strategy Application

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Purpose

To seek formal board endorsement of the new Cairngorms National Park Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2011-15 as required for re-application for the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board formally endorse the new Strategy and Action Plan.

Executive Summary

The Cairngorms National Park was awarded the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas* in March 2005. A Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism is required as part of the Charter. The current version runs from 2005-2010 although a delay in re-application by 1 year was approved in 2008 to align more closely with the National Park Plan process.

The new strategy has been developed during 2010 by Richard Denman of The Tourism Company. The Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum (CSTF), which has broad industry, environmental and community representation, provided direction and guidance to the process and has been closely involved throughout. The draft strategy was subject to wide stakeholder engagement and formal public consultation. The current version has been agreed by the CSTF and other key partners. Formal submission to EUROPARC will be in late January with a verifiers visit due in summer 2011.

It is anticipated that the Strategy will enable much of the delivery of the emerging 'sustainable destination' theme in the next Park Plan.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY APPLICATION – FOR DECISION

Background

1. In March 2005 The Cairngorms National Park was awarded the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (hereafter called the Charter) by the EUROPARC Federation, an international organisation representing over 400 members including protected area managers, governmental departments, NGO's and businesses in 36 countries. The Cairngorms National Park was the first National Park in the UK to be awarded the Charter and the award was based on the submission of a Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism (2005-10).
2. Preparation of the Strategy, which was assisted by considerable input from the National Park's Tourism Development Working Group and then the ViSIT Forum, pre-dated the first National Park Plan and assisted with the development of a number of early practical initiatives. When the National Park Plan was developed the main themes from the Strategy were incorporated into the relevant Strategic Objectives and Priorities for Action.
3. An informal review of progress in implementing the Strategy was undertaken in 2008 and was reported to the CNPA Board and partners. The review report was generally positive, noting "...*The overall conclusion from the review is that CNPA and its partners have made very good progress on the development and management of sustainable tourism in the Cairngorms. We are impressed with what has been achieved.*" A further report of actions to address the key issues raised in the Review was taken to the CNPA Board in January 2009.
4. Although a re-application for the Charter was technically required in March 2010, the CNPA Board requested from Europarc a one year delay in renewal of the Strategy to allow the results of the 2009/10 visitor survey to be considered and to reduce the gap in timescales between the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the National Park Plan from two years to one. Following a tender process The Tourism Company were commissioned to re-develop a new strategy and have been conducting this work with a wide range of stakeholders during 2010.

The Charter

5. The Charter is a practical management tool which helps protected areas to continuously improve the sustainable development and the management of tourism taking account of the needs of the environment, the local population and the local tourism businesses. The Charter is not a typical quality or eco-label but a methodology (based on 10 Principles as set out in **Annex I**) that can be used and applied by all kinds of protected areas. The Charter's focus is on initiating and assisting a process of sustainable tourism planning which will lead to sustainable development step by step. The Charter assists this process by providing a 'strategy development kit' which contains principles, a methodology and check-lists for the

protected areas to work with. The implementation of the Charter methodology increases the awareness of and support for European protected areas¹.

6. The process followed in gaining the Charter provided a useful framework for debate and discussion on sustainable tourism. This helped inform the first Park Plan and is helping with the development of the next Park Plan. The Strategy and Action Plan also shaped much of the activity within the Priorities for Action, in particular Awareness and Understanding and Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable. However, there is less direct engagement with the Charter and Strategy from most of our key stakeholders.

The Strategy

7. This strategy is not a major departure from the previous one. Rather it is a revision and redevelopment, building on the strong foundations already in place. The full strategy and action plan are at **Annex 2**. The document contains three main sections: a detailed assessment of the current position; the strategic approach and objectives; and, priorities for action.

Strategic Objectives

8. The key principle highlighted is that *National Park = Opportunity + Responsibility*. Six strategic objectives are identified, each with an outcome and proposed indicators:
 - a) Tourism growth (in value).
 - b) Customer focus (expectations and needs understood and addressed).
 - c) Special qualities (strengthen awareness and understanding, provide experiences).
 - d) Geographical diversity (recognise and promote individual qualities).
 - e) Environmental impact (minimise negative, gain support for enhancement).
 - f) Leadership and partnership (strengthen engagement).

Priorities for Action

9. A detailed list of 53 actions is proposed. It is not planned to include all these in the next Park Plan but instead group them into appropriate work packages for delivery. This could be on a spatial, thematic or sectoral basis. We need to retain a degree of flexibility to enable us to better coordinate the delivery of the actions with our partners. The eight action areas are:
 - a) Stakeholder engagement and working together.
 - b) Brand awareness and marketing.
 - c) Information and interpretation.
 - d) Resource management and conservation.
 - e) Outdoor access.
 - f) Product diversification and distinctiveness.
 - g) Business support and investment.
 - h) Knowledge gathering and sharing.

Consultation

¹ Further information can be found at www.european-charter.org/home/.

10. A key objective given to The Tourism Company was *to ensure that all interested parties in tourism are involved in the development of the strategy and action plan*. The engagement process included:
- a) A business enterprise survey.
 - b) Telephone and personal visits with key individuals in the tourism sector.
 - c) Two open workshops.
 - d) A presentation to the CNPA Board.
 - e) Formal public consultation on the draft.
 - f) Three meetings of the CSTF.
 - g) Detailed discussion and close liaison with the CBP.
11. The consultation was extensive and spread across all sectors but it is worth highlighting the role of two particular groups.

Cairngorms Sustainable Tourism Forum

12. The CSTF is one of five Advisory Forums in the Park and was re-established in May 2010. The benefits of having a tourism forum are particularly tied up with the requirement of the European Charter. The purpose of the CSTF, as agreed by the CNPA Board, is to bring together those with an interest in and responsibility for implementing the principles of the European Charter and to:
- a) Advise on the development of the strategy for sustainable tourism;
 - b) Advise each other and CNPA on issues relating to sustainable tourism; and
 - c) Provide a mechanism for cross-sector discussion and consultation on sustainable tourism issues.
13. The members of the Forum have been appointed by CNPA on the nomination of each of the respective lead bodies identified in the table below.

Stakeholder Group	Number of places	Lead body for identification of participants
Tourism Businesses	5	Cairngorms Business Partnership
Local community organisations	5	Association of Cairngorms Communities
Conservation Organisations	2	Scottish Environment Link
Public agencies	3	CNPA, SNH and VisitScotland
Local authorities	3	Agreement between each local authority
Land managers	2	SRPBA, NFUS
Total	20	

Cairngorms Business Partnership

14. As one of the key partners for tourism and business related work in the Park the CBP has an important role to play. They were also leading on the development of a new marketing strategy for the Park in parallel to the drafting of the strategy. Close liaison and formal collaboration was established between these two pieces of work to ensure they remained coherent and to minimise the potential for confusion amongst those being consulted.

15. The CBP have helped provide detailed input to the strategy, through their seat on the CSTF and in separate engagement. The new Park-wide 'Marketing Framework' they have developed sits comfortably with the strategy as do emerging marketing campaign ideas and future project activity.

Recommendation

16. **That the Board formally endorse the new Cairngorms National Park Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2011-15.**

Policy Context

17. The development of a well-informed, internationally-accredited Sustainable Tourism Strategy can contribute particularly to the following National Government Outcomes:
- a) We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
 - b) We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.
 - c) We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
 - d) We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.
 - e) We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.

Delivering Sustainability

18. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy encourages more sustainable business practices and visitor behaviour within the tourism industry.

Delivering A Park for All

19. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy encourages improvements in quality and welcome for visitors of all ages, abilities and incomes.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

20. Developing the next Sustainable Tourism Strategy alongside the next draft National Park Plan will ensure clearer linkages between the two documents.

Implications

Financial Implications

21. Funding for the re-development and application has been agreed within the 2010-11 Operational Plan. Funding to enable implementation of the action plan will be subject to further detailed planning with partners.

Presentational Implications

22. The Strategy has been subject to wide consultation and has the backing of the CSTF. Any amendments that cause delay may create some presentational difficulty.

Implications for Stakeholders

23. The strategy has wide buy-in from most stakeholders. It has allowed many interested groups and individuals to provide input and the emerging coherence with the new Park Plan has been welcomed.

Next Steps

24. A final version of the Strategy will be submitted to EUROPARC following Board endorsement. We anticipate a verifier's visit in the early summer of 2011. The strategic objectives, outcomes and higher level guidance will be taken forwards in the consultations regarding the detailed development of the next Park Plan.

Chris Bremner
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Annex I: The Charter Principles for Sustainable Tourism

Working in Partnership

Principle 1:

1. To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.
2. A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established between the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. Links with regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained.

Preparing and Implementing a Strategy

Principle 2:

3. To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.
4. The strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain:
 - a) A definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area
 - b) An assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances; considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity
 - c) An assessment of current visitors and potential future markets
 - d) A set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering:
 - i. conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage;
 - ii. economic and social development;
 - iii. preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents;
 - iv. visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered.
 - e) An action plan to meet these objectives
 - f) An indication of resources and partners to implement the strategy
 - g) Proposals for monitoring results

Addressing key issues

5. Each protected area is different. Strategic priorities and action programmes should be determined locally, using the approach described above. However, the following key issues should be addressed:

Principle 3:

6. To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development by:
 - a) monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations
 - b) encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions
 - c) controlling and reducing activities, including tourism impacts, which: adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise
 - d) encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation

Principle 4:

7. To provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit, by:
 - a) researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors
 - b) meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors
 - c) supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services

Principle 5:

8. To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area, by:
 - a) ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images, and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different locations
 - b) providing readily available and good quality visitor information in and around the area, and assisting tourism enterprises to do so
 - c) providing educational facilities and services that interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people, including groups and schools

Principle 6:

9. To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by:
 - a) providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage

Principle 7:

10. To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, by:
 - a) providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises, based on assessing training needs

Principle 8:

11. To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents, by:
- a) involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area
 - b) ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors
 - c) identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise

Principle 9:

12. To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy, by:
- a) promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses
 - b) encouraging the employment of local people in tourism

Principle 10:

13. To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts, by:
- a) keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises
 - b) creating and implementing a visitor management plan
 - c) promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars
 - d) controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development

Source: European Charter website, www.european-charter.org/home/, May