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## CAIRNGORMS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

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**Title:** Cycling in the Cairngorms National Park

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**Purpose:** The Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Cairngorms Business Partnership, with the support of the Cairngorms Sustainable Tourist Forum and the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum, has identified a need to take forward work looking at a strategic approach to cycling in the CNP. This paper describes the policy context to this and raises a number of issues for the Forum's consideration.

**Advice Sought:** The Forum are asked to advise on the issues and opportunities that this piece of work needs to address, outlined at the end of the paper

### **Background**

Since the Core Path Plan was published in 2009 work has started on implementing the changes on the ground that will encourage people to use the network, and beyond, for recreation and functional access. This includes the path signage project and community path leaflets which have already been produced for a number of the villages in the Park. Whilst many of the paths are suitable for multi-use, there is further work required to identify specific biking opportunities - both on and off road, around and between communities as well as longer routes – and address the issues that these raise. The review of CPP is being aligned with the Development Plan process in 2013 and so an informal review as an interim measure will commence this spring.

Currently the CNPA and CBP (with the support of the CSTF, the LOAF) feel that there is a need to look more closely at cycling *as a whole* within the CNP which would include road cycling and touring, as well as mountain biking.

### **Policy Context**

#### **National Park Plan**

The draft NPP 2013-18 under the Active Cairngorms programme provides a focus for action on Developing Cycling which states:

“The Park has a very strong network of off-road routes that can be used for cycling for recreation and for active travel between communities, visitor attractions and services. This work package will focus on improving the access to, and awareness of, these routes, establishing missing links, ensuring trunk road improvements in providing suitable off road links, and developing the wider infrastructure and support services for cyclists using these routes as well as the road network. It brings together the private sector, voluntary sector and public sector”

Detail of this work will be addressed in the forthcoming review of the Outdoor Access Strategy

### **Outdoor Access Strategy**

The CNP Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-12 is due for revision this year. Over the past five year of the current OAS, cycling issues - in particular mountain biking – have come to the fore and it is likely that the revision will be an opportunity to expand on our thinking about the place of and promotion of cycling activity in the Park. The audit informing the Strategy will need to be refreshed and further consultation undertaken with communities of interest.

Whereas there is a strong impetus to progress quickly, we feel it is best laid out as part of the OAS review and there is little sense in fast tracking this piece of work. We are aiming to engage with communities, recreational users, land managers and other stakeholders later in the autumn.

### **Sustainable Tourism Strategy**

The CNP Sustainable Tourism Strategy includes a number of actions under the theme of Outdoor Access. Action 4.5e refers to ‘providing and promoting specific opportunities for cycling and mountain biking’ and included specific actions relating to promoting responsible behaviour; provision of good information and provision of a range of dedicated routes locations at all levels of ability.

### **Scottish Mountain Biking Development Consortium**

The SMBDC have developed a National Strategic Framework for mountain biking in Scotland. The framework which is embedded in concepts of sustainable tourism and responsible access has three key objectives:

- Increased participation leading to improved health and well-being
- Tourism and economic development
- Sporting development and success

Broad geographical areas - Development Clusters - were identified within which to take the Framework forward. The Highlands have been identified as one such cluster, and this has been extended to include the area of the CNP with support of the CNPA. The Highland Development Cluster has recently completed a piece of desk research to collate information on the current provision of mountain biking within their area; to identify any gaps in provision; and the potential for economic growth, health and sporting benefits relating to mountain biking.

### **Highlands Cluster Study – a summary**

#### **Highland-wide issues**

The exercise to map mountain biking provision Highland-wide identified a series of general gaps, in terms of:

- Navigation, such as issues with signage and mapping;

- Lifecycle issues, for example a lack of beginner and family trails and underdeveloped youth provision in some areas;
- Networking and integration - issues of disparate interests, environmental sustainability, liability, responsibility and maintenance
- The lack of an identifiable brand and integrated marketing and promotion for Highlands mountain biking

A number of key suggestions have been made to enable appropriate levels of sectoral growth including:

- the greater use of volunteer groups for trail maintenance
- the redefinition of paths as 'multi-use'
- the creation of easier routes to encourage family use
- the more formal designation of mountain biking centres or hubs (Inverness as a priority)
- development of an identifiable brand for mountain biking in the Highlands
- a single Highlands web portal for information

### **CNP Specific issues**

In respect of the CNP, the Study identified that the economic value of mountain biking in terms of expenditure is £1.86m and employs 54 FTE's. There are 4 main issues identified by the report:

- The proliferation of informal groups, largely participating in recreational mountain biking, operating out of communities and bike shops. The interests of this demographic group are hard to represent but there is a risk that their interests could remain unknown within an integrated management approach.
- The CNP is characterized by a high percentage of private landowners requiring the establishment of good working agreements with landowners in order to progress. way-marking, promotion or volunteer maintenance, for example. Mountain bikers need to come together as credible, constituted groups, willing to assume the responsibility to take on agreements, liability and management of trails.
- Successful mountain biking developments have had multi-agency support, such as Grantown and Glenmore Lodge Skills Park
- Purpose-built mountain biking facilities throughout the CNP are largely rural developments with poor public transport links which require car access, pointing to accessibility issues for many.

The report clearly throws up a number of issues and at the time of writing, the CNPA have not finalised their response and there are still opportunities to influence it. Nonetheless within the CNP, we have identified the following areas which could be the focus of future

strategic work – some of which relate to mountain biking only; and others to all modes of cycling:

- Responsible access – promoting awareness and understanding of the Code; supporting other initiatives as vehicles for the ‘responsible behaviour’ message; encouraging the engagement of young people through skills training, clubs and informal networks
- Informal trail development – addressing the concerns about liability, natural heritage disturbance and the need for local, car free and on-the-door step opportunities
- Formal development – support for dedicated mountain bike trail provision esp. close to communities
- Capacity building – working to encourage better links between users, communities and land owners esp. in dispute resolution and developing/ managing future provision
- Engagement with land owners - esp. looking beyond the public Forest Estate to the private and charitable/ NGO sector to get support for development, promotion etc.
- Natural heritage sensitivities – addressing the tensions between mountain biking and the pinewood species of Strathspey and Deeside; same goes for upland species and are issues germane to *all* forms of recreation
- Maintenance of paths – considering the implications of multi-use on paths and accommodating this in path work practices where appropriate
- Promotion of cycling – mapping of routes and places; location of information hubs; use of websites and social media
- Functional access – more off-road opportunities to connect communities esp. places like schools, halls etc. and places of interest; aspiration to upgrade existing Speyside Way, and construct the Speyside Way Extension, to support cycling use
- Active Travel – encouraging greater use of bikes for commuting and everyday journeys;
- Sustainable Transport – influence rail and bus operators to facilitate travel to and around the CNP with cycles;
- Touring – improved management of NCN routes; promotion of ‘classic’ road routes like the ‘Round the Cairngorms’ and the ‘Snow Roads’ rides; long distance off-road routes
- Cyclists Welcome – promotion of cycle friendly accommodation in the Park

**The Forum is asked to advise on the points above – are these the right issues to focus on, and is there anything missing?**