

**ABERDEEN CITY & SHIRE
STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AUTHORITY**

Date: 15 December 2011

**Title: Cairngorms National Park Authority – Draft National Park
Plan and Local Development Plan Main Issues Report**

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) for a response to the consultations by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on their draft National Park Plan and Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.

2 Background

2.1 The SDPA has a shared boundary with the Cairngorms National Park within Aberdeenshire. The Scottish Government guidance on the determination of strategic development plan boundaries ([Scottish Government Circular 2/2008](#)) recommended that strategic development plan areas should be drawn up in such a way as to exclude areas within current national parks. This advice was followed by the SDPA when it proposed its area boundary in September 2008 and was accepted by Scottish Ministers ([Scottish Government Circular 3/2008](#)).

2.2 The current National Park Plan (approved by Scottish Ministers on 15 March 2007) is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within the Cairngorms National Park. North East Scotland Together (2001) is still part of the development plan in the National Park and will continue to be until their local plan (adopted 29 October 2010) is replaced by a local development plan.

2.3 Meetings with officers from the CNPA took place in early 2011 as part of our liaison with adjoining planning authorities.

2.4 The consultation period for both the draft National Park Plan and the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report runs from 19 September to 9 December 2011. The focus for the SDPA in commenting on these documents is any strategic cross-boundary issues arising from these documents.

3 Draft National Park Plan

3.1 The Draft National Park Plan (<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/national-park-plan/cairngorms-national-park-plan-2012-2017>) covers the period 2012 – 2017 and builds on the current plan. It sets out a long-term vision and objectives and what the CNPA considers necessary to deliver the four aims of the park in a co-ordinated way.

3.2 The purpose of the National Park Plan is to set the direction and framework for all those involved in contributing to the management and success of the National Park.

3.3 In addition to the existing plan's 23 strategic objectives, the draft plan proposes ten '5-year outcomes' for the park, with associated actions and indicators / targets. These outcomes are:

- More people will learn about, enjoy and help to conserve and enhance the special natural and cultural qualities of the Park.
- The quality and connectivity of habitats will have improved, enhancing the landscape at a Park scale.
- The species for which the Cairngorms National Park is most important will be in better conservation status in the Park.
- The qualities of wildness in the Park will be greater.
- There will be a better targeted programme of advice and support for land managers in the Park that delivers the National Park Plan.
- The economy of the Park will have grown and diversified, drawing on the Park's special qualities.
- Settlements and built development will retain and enhance the distinct sense of place and identity within the landscapes of the Park.
- Business and communities will be successfully adapting to a low carbon economy.
- The Park's communities will be more empowered and able to develop their own models of sustainability.
- The Park's recreation opportunities will have improved the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors.

3.4 Section 5 of the draft plan sets out its land use strategy using eight policy directions, one of which relates to developing sustainable patterns of settlement growth, infrastructure and communications (Policy Direction 8 – p80-82).

Proposed Response

3.5 The draft plan recognises at the start that the national park does not exist in isolation but is an integral part of its surrounding areas and that management needs to consider the cross boundary influences and recognise its wider connections. However, the draft plan seems to pass over some important issues relating to transport. There would be value in recognising the role that the three Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), including Nestrans, have and their role (along with the individual councils) in relation to the transport of visitors to the park as well as transport within it. With the claimed 1.4million visitors to the park on an annual basis, transport to the park may well have a greater impact than transport within the park, particularly its environmental impact. In this context, the plan doesn't appear to engage with where these visitors come from and how they get to the park which might be a topic worthy of further consideration.

- 3.6 The second issue worthy of highlighting to the CNPA is that the draft plan includes a diagram on page 13 (reproduced in Appendix 1) which would appear to present a potentially misleading impression of the growth strategy of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. It indicates areas identified for “Future Economic Growth” whereas a designation as “Focus for Future Economic Growth” might be more appropriate. An alternative would be to use illustrative material from National Planning Framework 2 because it is recognised that the reproduction of a simplified version of the structure plan’s spatial strategy is unlikely to be appropriate in this context.
- 3.7 The third issue is the importance of high-speed internet connections which is highlighted in a number of places throughout the document. However, there would be value in highlighting the role that is and can be played by the local authorities, other economic development bodies and the wider public sector in bringing forward the required infrastructure. These groups would appear to be missing from the groups identified against the relevant actions on p43, where local authorities and RTPs are also missing from the list in relation to transport connectivity.
- 3.8 The fourth point to raise is to welcome the plan’s recognition of water as a key natural resource which impacts on the National Park as well as downstream areas outside its boundary. Land use in the National Park will have a key impact on runoff into the River Dee and its tributaries which is critical in the context of the use of that water downstream and the potential impacts of climate change.

4 Local Development Plan Main Issues Report

- 4.1 The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan was only adopted in October 2010 but the CNPA is keen to prepare a replacement local development plan as soon as possible and in tandem with the National Park Plan. The Main Issues Report (<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/planning/local-plan/main-issues-report-consultation>) identifies seven broad planning issues facing the National Park:

- Special Qualities of the Park
- Resources / Reducing our Consumption
- Support for our Communities
- Housing / Affordable Housing
- Spatial Strategy
- Support for our Rural Areas
- Connectivity and Communications

Proposed Response

- 4.2 The Main Issues Report does not raise any additional topics worthy of a response from the SDPA beyond those already highlighted in response to the Draft National Park Plan. However, most of the issues raised relate to both documents.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the SDPA agree to send this report to the Cairngorms National Park Authority as its response to the two consultation documents, welcoming the opportunity to comment at this stage and wishing them well as both plans progress to approval / adoption.

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Appendix 1: Extract from the Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan 2012 – 2017

