

Countryside & Natural Heritage

New Directions for Land Management Schemes in Scotland's National Parks

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Land management has played a central role in shaping the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and the proposed Cairngorms National Park. However, if it is to continue to help maintain the high quality environments of these areas, as well as to contribute to the livelihoods of local people, land management within these areas will require further support. Following on from Action 47 of *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, this project has assessed the extent to which 'new directions' for land management schemes in the two National Park areas can be developed as a means of providing support in a more innovative and sustainable way. Overall conclusions focus on the need to develop locally specific and integrated projects which are set within an overall strategic framework for each area.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

- Land management plays a key role in maintaining the special character and features of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and proposed Cairngorms National Park. Consultation, combined with a desk based study, showed that whilst people within these areas are committed to maintaining a viable land management sector, there is a need for fresh ideas and innovation if ongoing restructuring and problems being faced by land managers, and indeed the wider rural community, are to be overcome.
- In addition, the ways in which support for land managers is delivered in these areas requires a review, to ensure that land managers not only continue to contribute to the aims of the National Parks, but also benefit from the new status of these areas.
- There therefore is a need to develop support structures for land managers within the two new National Park areas that are sufficiently flexible to take into account local circumstances, but which are also set within an overall strategic framework for the area as a whole.
- Within both areas there is a need to consider the ways in which local initiatives can provide more comprehensive support for land management in relation to the natural and built heritage.
- In addition, proposed priority schemes for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs include improved business advice and support for land managers, a park-wide product branding scheme, a scheme encouraging new entrants to farming, and encouraging land managers to promote and help to manage responsible access to the countryside.
- In the Cairngorms, there is a need to focus on the development of an area-wide quality branding scheme, an access scheme which provides scope for education and interpretation by land managers, a one stop advice shop, and a 'living on the land' scheme which focuses on maintaining vibrant communities in the area.
- These specific components should be brought together to form a single, integrated scheme for each of the areas. Within each area, a 'land management framework' should be developed which provides a context within which more locally specific schemes could be developed. Set within this context, land management contracts could provide an ideal tool for developing locally based initiatives which are both integrated and integrative.

Background

Land management in Scotland has been under considerable pressure in recent years. Key problems include changing markets, the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease and BSE, concerns about quality of produce, demographic change within the sector, market trends, and the ongoing review of support schemes including the Common Agricultural Policy.

Some policies have emerged which aim to respond to these changes as well as the issues arising in relation to the wider rural community as a whole. Key policy documents include the Rural Development Plan for Scotland (approved by the EC in 2000) and the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture (2001). Within this policy framework, some practical support mechanisms have already emerged which aim to deliver a more integrated approach to rural development, including broader based agri-environment schemes, and ongoing reviews of forestry support mechanisms.

However, within protected areas such as the two proposed National Parks in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and the Cairngorms, the overall problems of the land management sector are likely to be compounded by particular responsibilities associated with environmental and recreational management. As a result, Action 47 of *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, sets out the need for 'new directions' for land management schemes within these areas to be identified and taken forward.

Aim and Methods

In response to this agenda, the aim of the study was to explore ways in which land management within the two proposed National Park areas in Scotland could generate a wider range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

The study included an initial assessment of existing funding structures, as well as a broader review of good practice and innovation in land management support schemes in the rest of the UK and beyond. A desk based review of the baseline conditions within each of the National Park areas was also undertaken, in order to identify key gaps and future opportunities for new schemes in the areas. Consultation with key stakeholders and the wider land management community was undertaken. Finally, these findings were brought together to identify scope for developing new schemes for each of the areas.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Shared concerns and opportunities

Land managers and wider communities of interest

emphasised the contribution which land management is already making towards the character and identity of both National Park areas. At the same time, there are widespread concerns that current reliance on subsidies, together with the ongoing pressures on the land management sector, is not sustainable. As a result, there is a recognition that new approaches and innovation are required to ensure that the special character of these areas is maintained, and also that land managers realise the benefits that the new National Park status could potentially provide.

Shared concerns include the need to not only stimulate locally specific schemes, but also to develop integrated park wide responses to the problems and opportunities for both areas. There is a need to fundamentally review the effectiveness of existing schemes, including the coverage of agri-environment programmes. At the same time, however, key opportunities include the scope for connecting land manager with market opportunities and stimulating diversification, as a means of reducing reliance on reducing sources of public support for the sector.

Recommendations for schemes in both National Park areas

In response to these issues, it is proposed that a single land management scheme is established for each of the areas. Such a scheme should combine a clear, park wide strategic framework for action, with scope and flexibility for locally defined priorities to be developed within it. The study recommendations set out the ways in which such a scheme could be developed. This includes ongoing strategic liaison with land management interests in each area to establish park wide priorities. Partnership working with conservation interests, agencies supporting economic development and the wider community is also central to the recommended approach.

The report also sets out a 'menu' of locally defined priorities which should be developed within each of the area:

Priorities for local developments in The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

The analysis of baseline conditions in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs highlighted the changing nature of land management in the area. There has been a reduction in the area's dairy herd and arable land, combined with an increase in sheep grazing. Although full time in the farming sector has declined, agriculture remains an important part of the economy of the area. There has been a gradual shift from an emphasis on production towards more environmentally sensitive farming practices in the area. Land management as a whole within the area, is heavily dependent on traditional subsidies, not least as a result of less favoured status of much of the land.

Consultation within the area was undertaken through a series of workshops which specifically targeted the participation of the farming community. The findings highlighted strong support for maintaining a viable land management sector within the area, whilst also responding to the challenges and opportunities which the new status may result in. Key opportunities identified included:

- focusing on helping land managers to provide non market benefits, where these meet the aims of the National Park, and would not otherwise be provided;
- positively encouraging the involvement of land managers in promoting understanding and responsible enjoyment of the countryside by the public;
- providing new economic futures for the area's land management community by developing local branding and marketing initiatives and establishing stronger links between land managers and the wider community.

As a result, the following local components are suggested for the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park:

- **Component 1:** a scheme which fills the gap in current agri-environment schemes. Augmenting the provisions of the Rural Stewardship Scheme, priorities for such a measure in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs include development of a programme of whole farm plans for conservation, which are non competitive and provide scope to be topped up to meet specific requirements of special environments.
- **Component 2:** provision of business advice and support for land managers. This will help to consolidate a range of measures as a means of facilitating diversification and entrepreneurship.
- **Component 3:** a park wide branding scheme which encourages collaboration and builds on the high quality image of the park area for marketing of a range of products.
- **Component 4:** a new entrants scheme, which aims to revitalise the farming sector and builds links with the wider rural community.
- **Component 5:** a responsible access scheme. This should build on the participation of land managers to realise benefits for recreational users as well as the land management community itself through improved management and reduced disruption from high levels of use.

Priorities for local development in the proposed Cairngorms National Park

Moorland forms a key part of the landscape and environment of the proposed Cairngorms National Park. The area's

Moorland Forum is already actively pursuing an integrated management programme which seeks to enhance the environmental, social and economic benefits of moorland in the area. Agriculture within the area is dominated by livestock farming and, like the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, is currently heavily reliant on subsidies. A key exception to this is game management and sporting activities, providing a viable land use and key employer within the area.

The Cairngorms includes a wide range of special habitats and landscapes which are carefully conserved. Despite this, deer management continues to be a key problem in the area. Recreation, both passive and more active also forms a key land use, providing amenity for both visitors and local communities.

Consultation within the area, undertaken primarily through meeting with a range of reporting groups of the Cairngorms Partnership, highlighted the different interests in land management and their varying requirements. As well as the farming community, estate owners and managers have a key role to play. Considerable areas are also managed by communities themselves, as well as by specialist recreation interests. The key to successful land management schemes in the area is therefore the successful co-ordination of these different needs and opportunities.

Priorities for local schemes within the area therefore included:

- development of localised environmental schemes which fill the gaps in existing agri-environment programmes. This includes a new emphasis on cultural as well as natural heritage.
- establishment of schemes which foster more positive and synergistic relationships between land management, tourism and recreation.
- development of schemes which focus on the role of land management in relation to local communities and economies.

As a result, the following local components are suggested for the proposed Cairngorms National Park:

- **Component 1:** as in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, a top up environmental scheme which specifically aims to promote conservation of the built heritage alongside natural heritage management.
- **Component 2:** a Cairngorms quality branding scheme which builds on the high quality image of the environment, and targets the marketing of local produce towards local retail and service outlets catering for residents and visitors.

- **Component 3:** access schemes which focus on education and interpretation. Such schemes should provide mechanisms for land managers to realise the benefits from recreational use of the area, as well as providing a park wide co-ordinated management response for the area as a whole.
- **Component 4:** a 'living on the land' scheme which aims to revitalise remote rural communities by providing training, employment and housing and supporting local service provision.
- **Component 5:** a one stop advice shop which brings together business support advice in a clear and accessible way.

Implementation of the proposals

The report concludes by drawing conclusions on the implications of the recommendations in relation to policy, funding structures and partner responsibilities. The special nature of the area and innovative nature of the schemes

mean that additional resources are likely to be required to provide sufficient momentum for the recommendations to be put into action. However, it is also anticipated that the integrated nature of the schemes will lead to land managers gaining access to a wider range of broader support for integrated rural development, reflecting the direction for resource provision at a European level. Implementation of the recommendations will be reliant on the collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders, including economic, environmental and social organisations at a strategic level, as well as land managers and the wider rural community more locally.

About the Study

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