

The Highland Council

**Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee
16 November 2016**

Agenda Item	5
Report No	BSAC/ 21/16

Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy

Report by Director of Planning and Development

Summary

This paper presents the final version of the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy Document for member approval. It summarises the process undertaken to draft the document and highlights key elements within the strategy. A copy of the strategy document is attached as an appendix to this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership was formed in 2014 comprising CNPA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highland Council. The purpose of the Partnership is to co-ordinate future management of the land in public ownership at Cairngorm and Glenmore.
- 1.2 The Partners agreed that a long term strategy was required to develop a more co-ordinated approach to the publically owned area. CNPA has led on the strategy on behalf of the Partnership.

2 Consultation

- 2.1 A draft strategy for public consultation ran from 1st December 2015 to 8th March 2016. Overall the consultation responses endorsed the need for a strategy, supported the desire to improve facilities and visitor experience whilst maintaining the distinctive feel and conservation value of the area.
- 2.2 The consultation responses also highlighted the importance and need for integrated transport, an increased ranger service, outdoor learning, path works and signage. Since the consultation period closed there have been 3 further Partnership Board meetings to review the consultation findings and refine the attached strategy document for partner approval.

3 Strategy

- 3.1 This strategy sets out a long term direction to make the most of Cairngorm and Glenmore for people and nature; it does not attempt to be a detailed action plan, but is a short high level strategy. More detailed actions for specific facilities (Glenmore Visitor Improvement Plan, and proposals in development for the Cairngorm Mountain masterplan) will be set out in two spatial plans for Glenmore and Cairngorm to be completed in the next year.

- 3.2 The strategy therefore sets out a high level vision for the area, highlights how the Cairngorm and Glenmore publically owned land will help deliver the Cairngorm National Park's three outcomes for conservation, visitor experience and rural development. The document recognises that reconciling objectives for both recreation and conservation is the central challenge at Cairngorm and Glenmore and as such it identifies key spatial considerations and management principles which can guide management decisions in the future, and finally, the strategy identifies project teams to deliver actions on the ground.
- 3.3 To date the strategy has been approved by Forest Enterprise Management Board, HIE and the CNPA Board. The Highland Council is now asked to approve the strategy document (**Appendix 1**).

4. Implications

4.1 Resource implications

There are no additional resource implications arising from this paper. Where the Partnership actions lead to potential resource implications that cannot be accommodated within existing service budgets these will be reported and the appropriate approval sought.

4.2 Equality, legal, rural and risk implications

There are no immediate equality, legal or risk implications arising from this report. Risks will be considered on a projects specific basis as an integral part of the project planning process.

4.3 Gaelic implications

Opportunities for the inclusion of Gaelic will be considered on a project implementation basis.

4.4 Carbon Clever implications

There are no climate change or carbon clever implications attached to this report. The partnership's work on transport infrastructure is expected to lead to increased provision of cycle ways and footpaths.

9. Recommendation

9.1 The Committee is invited to consider the report and to:-

- i. note and approve the strategy document; and
- ii. agree that reports will be brought back to this committee on the progress of this strategy.

Designation: Director of Planning and Development
Date: 28 October 2016
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Liz Cowie, Ward Manager Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey

APPENDIX I

Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy

Introduction

Cairngorm and Glenmore are together an iconic destination in the Cairngorms National Park. Together with neighbouring Rothiemurchus, this area attracts 40% of all visitors to the National Park. In public ownership on behalf of the people of Scotland, The Cairngorm Estate is managed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the National Forest Estate is managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland. Public bodies formed a partnership in 2014 to collaborate on the long-term management of this significant area of publicly owned land.

The purpose of the Partnership is to collaborate in the strategic management of these land holdings in order to deliver:

- An exceptionally high quality natural environment
- A world-class visitor experience
- An economic asset contributing to the economy of the National Park and Scotland
- Engaged business and community stakeholders
- Efficient and effective public service delivery

This area is central to the identity of the Cairngorms as well as the local economy. There is a long history of debate and reports written about the area and distinct phases of development creating what we have today. It is a special place, but the results of some previous decisions made in the absence of an overall strategy over the decades are evident in the current visitor experience. We also want to not only conserve but enhance the conservation value, with Cairngorm and Glenmore sitting at the heart of some of Scotland's most important nature conservation sites, an expanding forest network and the country's most extensive montane plateau, all in the context of a destination central to the local economy.

A Special Place

Cairngorm and Glenmore is recognised locally and nationally as being a special place. Public consultation confirmed it is valued as:-

- A nationally important natural and cultural environment worthy of both protection and enhancement
- An outstanding landscape of native forest, loch and mountain, on the edge of wildness
- A starting place for wider adventures in the Cairngorms
- A major outdoor attraction with numerous opportunities to enjoy outdoor adventures and learning
- A key part of the visitor experience in the Cairngorms National Park

Purpose and use of Strategy

This strategy sets out a long term direction to make the most of Cairngorm and Glenmore for people and nature. We do not set out to create a blueprint but we can lay firm foundations now that will help ensure the multiple organisations involved in managing this area co-ordinate plans, decisions and investment with a common sense of purpose and direction. The strategy will be used:

- To increase collaboration between public agencies and private businesses in managing the area and progressing strategic projects;
- To help individual businesses and operators in the area shape development plans and connect the visitor experience;
- To inform and assess future development proposals;
- To make the case for investment in this part of the National Park.

The strategy sets out the overall approach and direction, informed by the public consultation. More detailed actions for specific facilities including those consulted on in the Glenmore Visitor Improvement Plan, and proposals in development for the Cairngorm Mountain masterplan, will be set out in two spatial plans for Glenmore and Cairngorm to be completed in the next year.



Vision

Cairngorm and Glenmore are in the most visited part of the National Park. We want the publicly owned landholding here to be at the heart of an ambitious collaboration to deliver a high quality visitor experience in an outstanding place for nature. We want Cairngorm and Glenmore to be recognised as an exemplar of managing conservation and recreation in a sensitive environment.

The National Park Partnership Plan sets out the vision for the National Park: *An outstanding National Park, enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together.*

It sets out three long term outcomes for the National Park:

- Conservation – a special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced
- Visitor Experience – people enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences
- Rural Development – a sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities

This strategy sets out how the publicly owned land at Cairngorm and Glenmore will contribute to this vision and long term outcomes:

Conservation	Visitor Experience	Rural Development
Cairngorm and Glenmore will be at the heart of collaboration with neighbours to protect the mountain plateau and an expanding forest around it	Cairngorm and Glenmore will continue to offer uniquely accessible recreation and learning opportunities on the edge of wildness	Cairngorm and Glenmore will be a high quality mountain and sports destination that continues to underpin the tourism economy of surrounding communities
<i>Contributing to Cairngorms Nature actions to expand native woodland, restore montane woodland, improve capercaillie habitat, reduce disturbance and inspire and engage people</i>	<i>Contributing to Active Cairngorms priorities to improve access and active travel infrastructure, champion best practice in recreation management in sensitive environments and inspire outdoor activity and involvement</i>	<i>Contributing to Cairngorms Economic Strategy priorities to build on the tourism strengths, improve the customer journey, enhance transport infrastructure and services and invest in natural capital.</i>

Approach

Cairngorm and Glenmore is the most visited area within the National Park and we expect visitor numbers to continue to steadily grow. At the same time we want to retain the quality of nature, landscape and sense of space and wildness that characterise this area. Significant investment is already being directed to other areas in the National Park to enhance visitor facilities and spread the economic benefit, for example the Speyside Way extension to Newtonmore, the Highland Wildlife Park and Highland Folk Museum, Laggan Wolfrax, Tomintoul and Glenlivet, the Deeside Way extension to Braemar. However, we expect Cairngorm and Glenmore to continue to be a natural focus for visitors and we need to plan and invest here to improve the experience.

We expect more people to come to this area over the years ahead, it would be unrealistic to expect otherwise. Therefore we must plan to enhance the facilities, welcome and management so that visitors can continue to enjoy an outstanding place while not impacting on the conservation value that makes it special.

Reconciling objectives for both recreation and conservation is the central challenge at Cairngorm and Glenmore. The area is one of the most sensitive places of high conservation value in the National Park, while also being the most popular visitor destination. In recognition of this high conservation value the land holdings include and are surrounded by land designated of national and European conservation importance, and for its wild land and scenic qualities.

We will tackle this challenge by

- a) Using the principles and spatial strategy set out here to guide management decisions on the ground;
- b) Using this strategy to inform more detailed spatial planning to make improvements at both Cairngorm Mountain and Glenmore.

The distinctive character and role for Cairngorm and Glenmore which we want to retain and enhance can be described as:

- An exceptionally high value area for conservation, home to many rare and special species of the National Park;
- A uniquely accessible mountain and forest visitor experience;
- A focus for high quality outdoor recreation, learning and activities;
- A setting-off point for the mountains;
- An experience of wildness for families and adventure enthusiasts alike;

- An important destination for outdoor sports (water, biking, snow and mountain), and in particular internationally recognised for mountaineering.
- Primarily a day visitor destination supporting accommodation provision in the wider area, with specialist accommodation associated with outdoor activity.

Spatially, key elements of this context include:	
Badenoch and Strathspey	the most accessible part of the Cairngorms National Park by road and rail, within 30 minutes drive of Inverness and its airport, the area is the most tourism-intensive rural economy in Scotland as well as being one of Scotland’s most valuable places for nature, for example the remaining national stronghold for capercaillie.
Aviemore	a well-connected, established settlement that is a focus for commercial and retail development: an economic hub for business, transport, residential and visitor accommodation and infrastructure.
Rothiemurchus and Coylumbridge	a popular forest destination with well-established visitor facilities: low altitude visitor activities, formal visitor attractions and accommodation; conservation and recreation managed in the context of the Rothiemurchus Forest Plan.
An Camas Mor	a new planned community scheduled to be developed over the next 30+ years.
Mountain core	the high mountain plateau commonly accessed from both Strathspey and Deeside, flanked by an increasingly connected forest.

Management Principles

Management and action plans within Cairngorm and Glenmore will deliver a high quality visitor experience in an outstanding natural environment using the following principles:-

1. Management interventions will improve the natural environment, landscape and visitor experience and retain the sense of wildness and space found in the area.
2. Actions within the area managed principally to enhance natural heritage (ref map) will improve both the designated features of these areas and the sense of wildness, with an emphasis on native woodland expansion.
3. Improvements to existing facilities or new built development will be within the land identified as being managed principally for recreation and learning (ref map).
4. Design of new facilities and enhancement works will be to a high standard, environmentally efficient, accessible to all and incorporating local natural materials.
5. Improvements to transport and access infrastructure will increase public transport and non-motorised access to the area from Aviemore and beyond; and walking and cycling within the area.
6. Information, signage, interpretation and outdoor learning will be coordinated and consistent throughout the area, celebrating the nature and culture of the forests and mountains of the Cairngorms while promoting responsible access.
7. Outdoor events will be co-ordinated through early planning and communication in line with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, avoiding the most sensitive areas for nature at key times of year.
8. All partners will collaborate on management across land holdings, with neighbouring businesses and land owners.

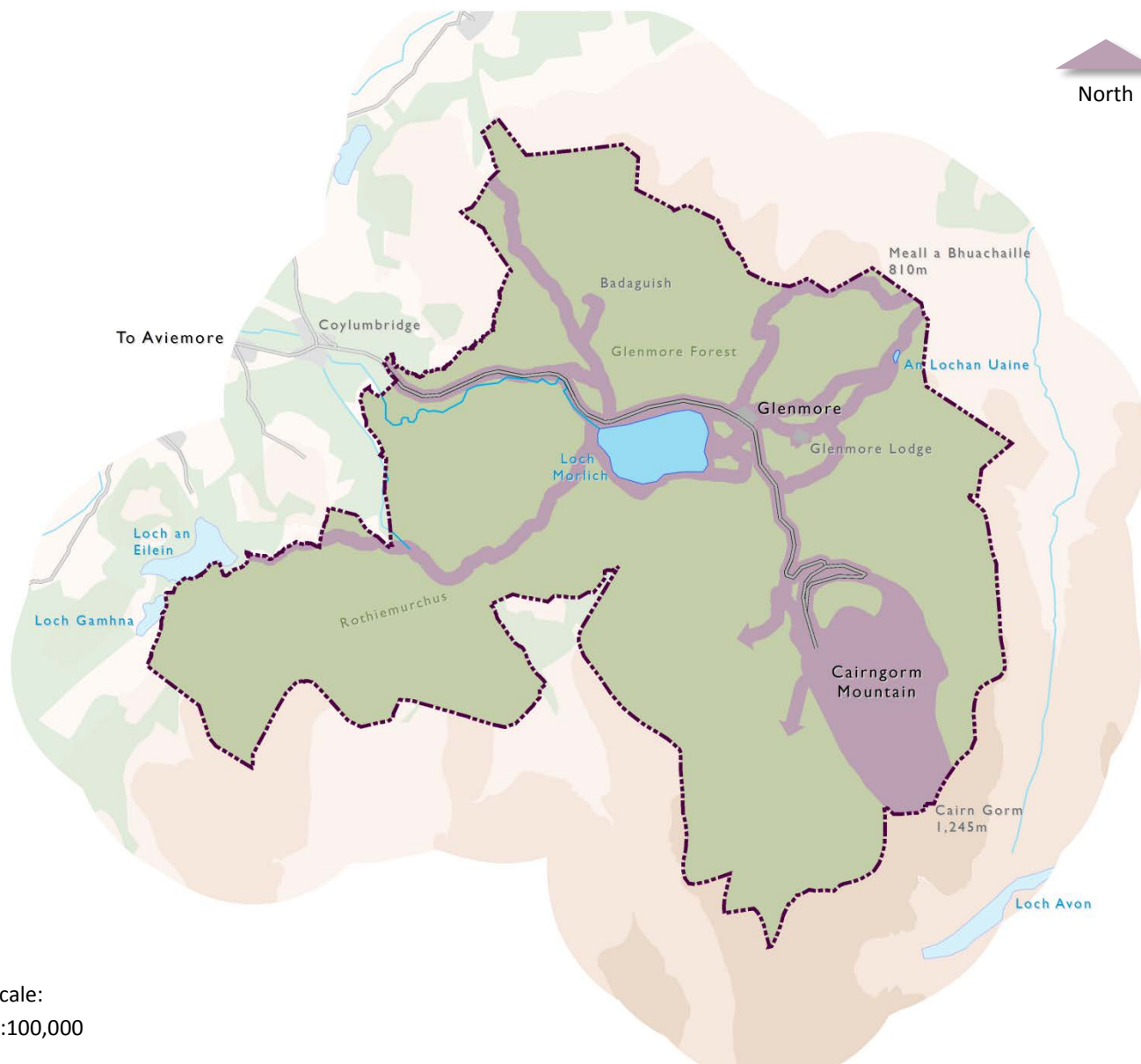




Figure 2. Cairngorm and Glenmore management principles

-  Principally managed to enhance natural heritage
-  Principally managed for recreation and learning

Scale:
1:100,000

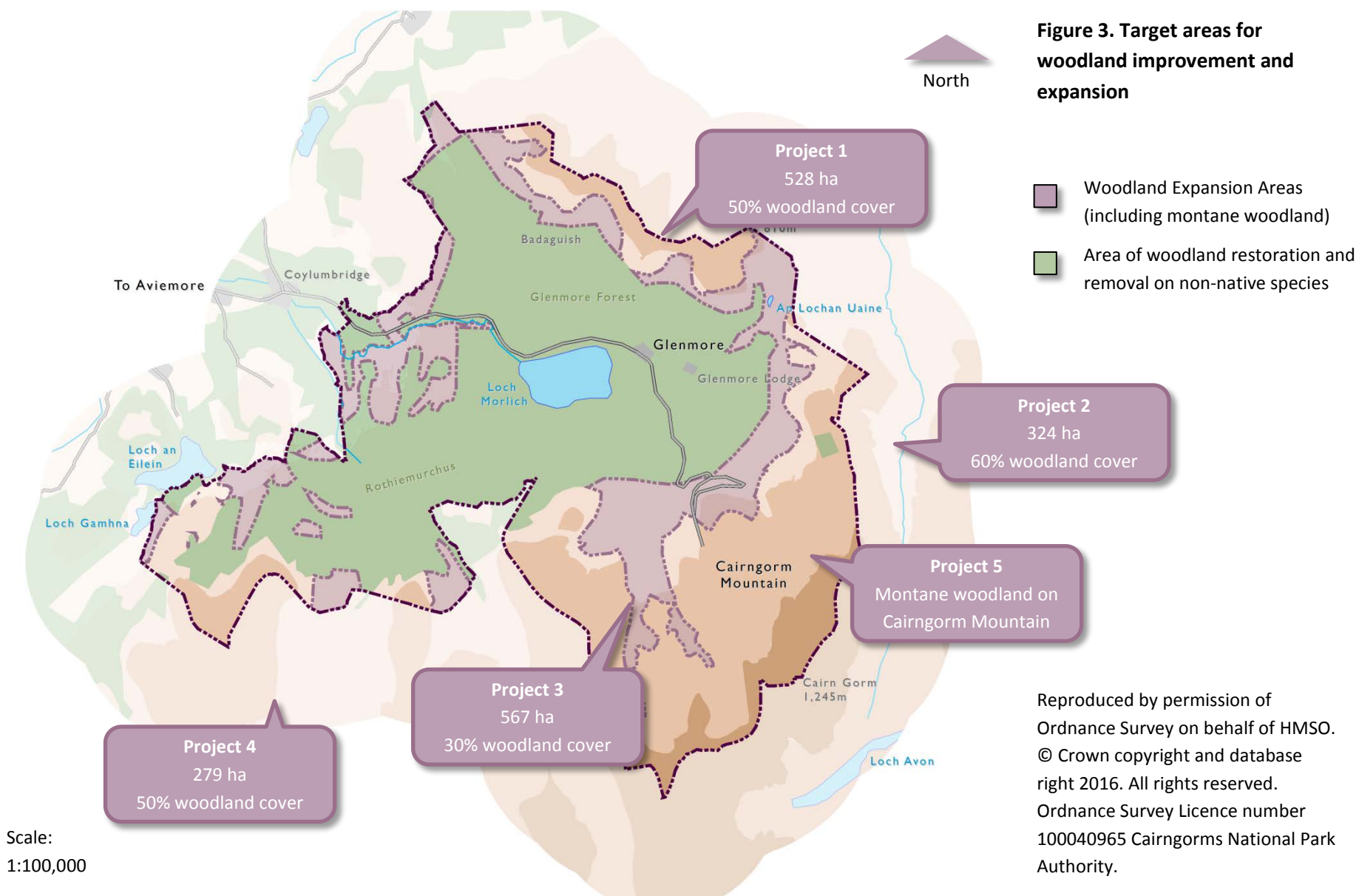
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Strategy

This strategy sets out the long term direction and short-term steps for management of Cairngorm and Glenmore for conservation, visitor experience and rural development. There is much ongoing work that will continue to contribute to the long term direction, and specific additional actions are set out here as the short term steps.

Long term Direction	Short Term Steps	Timescale		
		1-2 yrs	3-5 yrs	5-10 yrs
Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand woodland and remove non-native tree species as part of a connected vision with neighbours Restore montane woodland and natural tree lines Protect core areas of undisturbed habitat for capercaillie Safeguard the plateau habitats and species by actively managing recreation pressures Ensure management changes safeguard the features associated with the area's international and national status as Natura sites, National Scenic Area and Wild Land Area Ensure enhancements within the ski area are implemented to high quality standards appropriate to the sensitive environment 	Collaborate with neighbours to expand native woodland and continue non-native removal			
	Implement the capercaillie framework actions including review of recreation management and identification of core areas of undisturbed habitat			
	Expand montane woodland establishment within and around the ski area			
	Develop action plan to enhance the ski area by improving storage and removal of disused items			
	Develop agreed best practice standards for development and enhancement works in the ski area			
Visitor Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to a single integrated ranger service across Cairngorm and Glenmore with increased presence on the ground Enhance visitor infrastructure and facilities ensuring high quality low impact development 	Co-ordinate ranger services and review options for single service provision			
	De-clutter signage and co-ordinate better visitor signage and information			
	Feasibility study for improved public transport and park and ride approach			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the access network to make visitor orientation easier and reduce disturbance to sensitive habitats • Make a significant change in the way people access the area to increase the proportion of non-car access • Support enhancement of the wintersports experience and year round activity provision • Continue to operate the effective Visitor Management Plan associated with the funicular 	Improve effectiveness of existing car parks and reduce roadside parking			
	Work with on-site businesses to develop plans for enhancement of visitor facilities at Cairngorm Mountain and Glenmore			
	Create improved outdoor learning space and enhance volunteering opportunities			
	Improve views at key locations through selective tree felling and vegetation management			
Rural Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase business collaboration • Support improvements to the year round tourism offering • Improve the quality of place and infrastructure on which tourism and activity businesses depend • Improve co-ordination of marketing and promotion • Continue to develop the area’s reputation as a centre of excellence for outdoor learning and sport 	Collaborate on customer feedback and market research across on-site businesses			
	Invest in the quality of public space to ensure a high quality place			
	SYHA and partners to review options to renew the youth hostel facility			
	Collaborate with on-site businesses to improve cross promotion			
	Natural Retreats and partners to develop and deliver masterplan for Cairngorm Mountain			



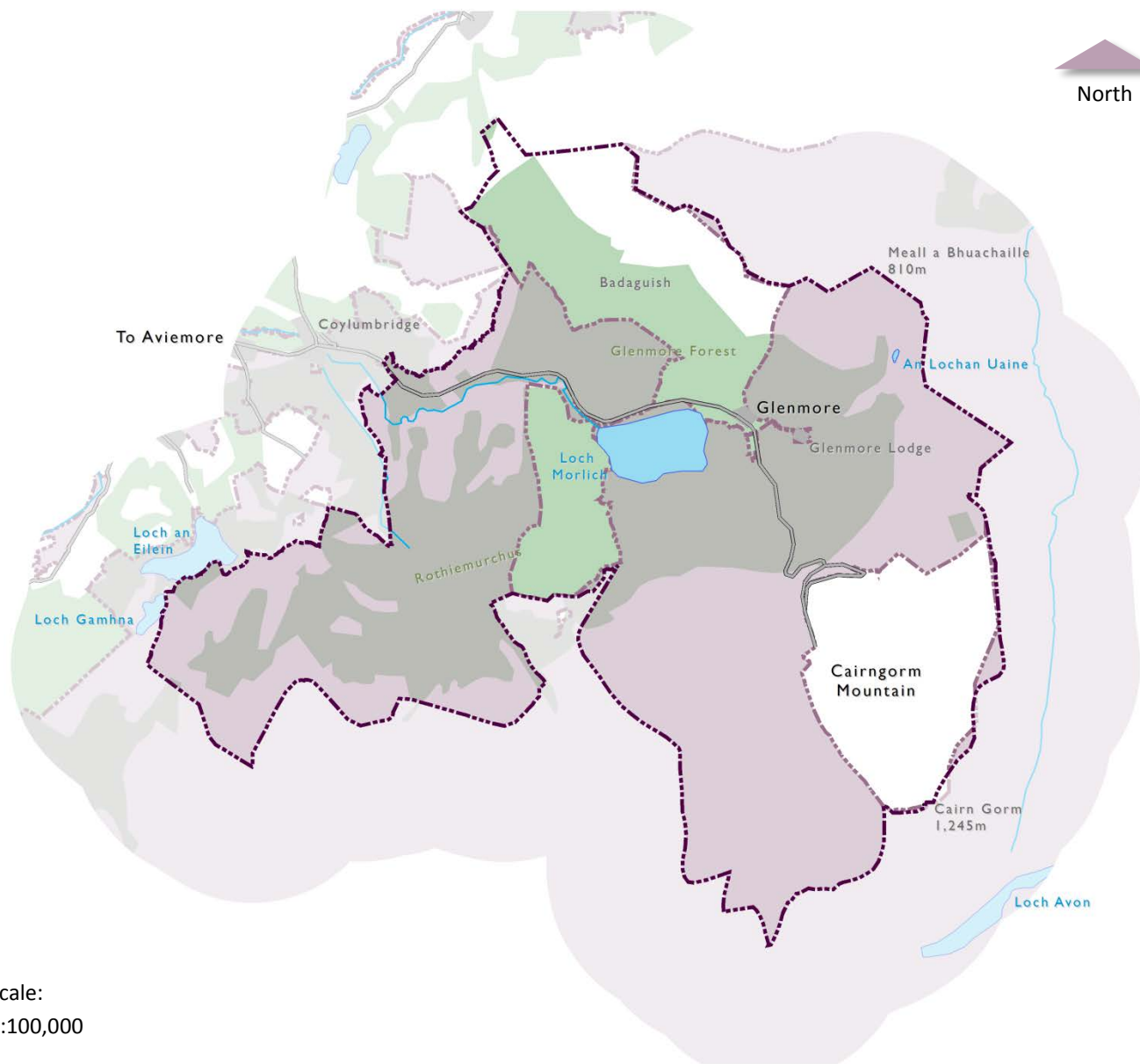


Figure 4. Conservation Designations

■ Nature designations (SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites, SSSIs and NNRs)

Scale:
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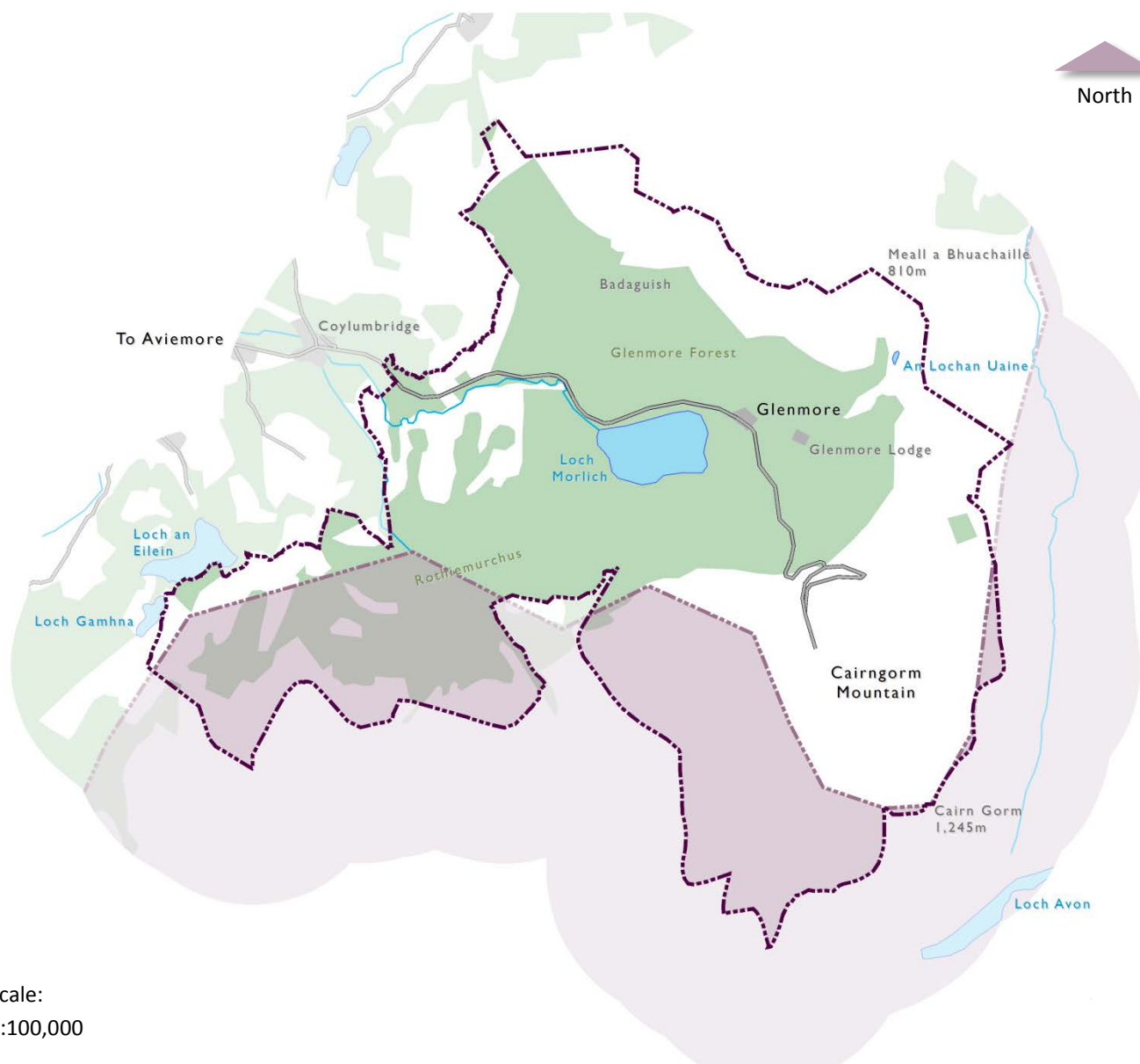


Figure 5. Wild Land and Scenic Areas

The entire area falls within the Cairngorms National Scenic Area

Wild Land Area

Scale:
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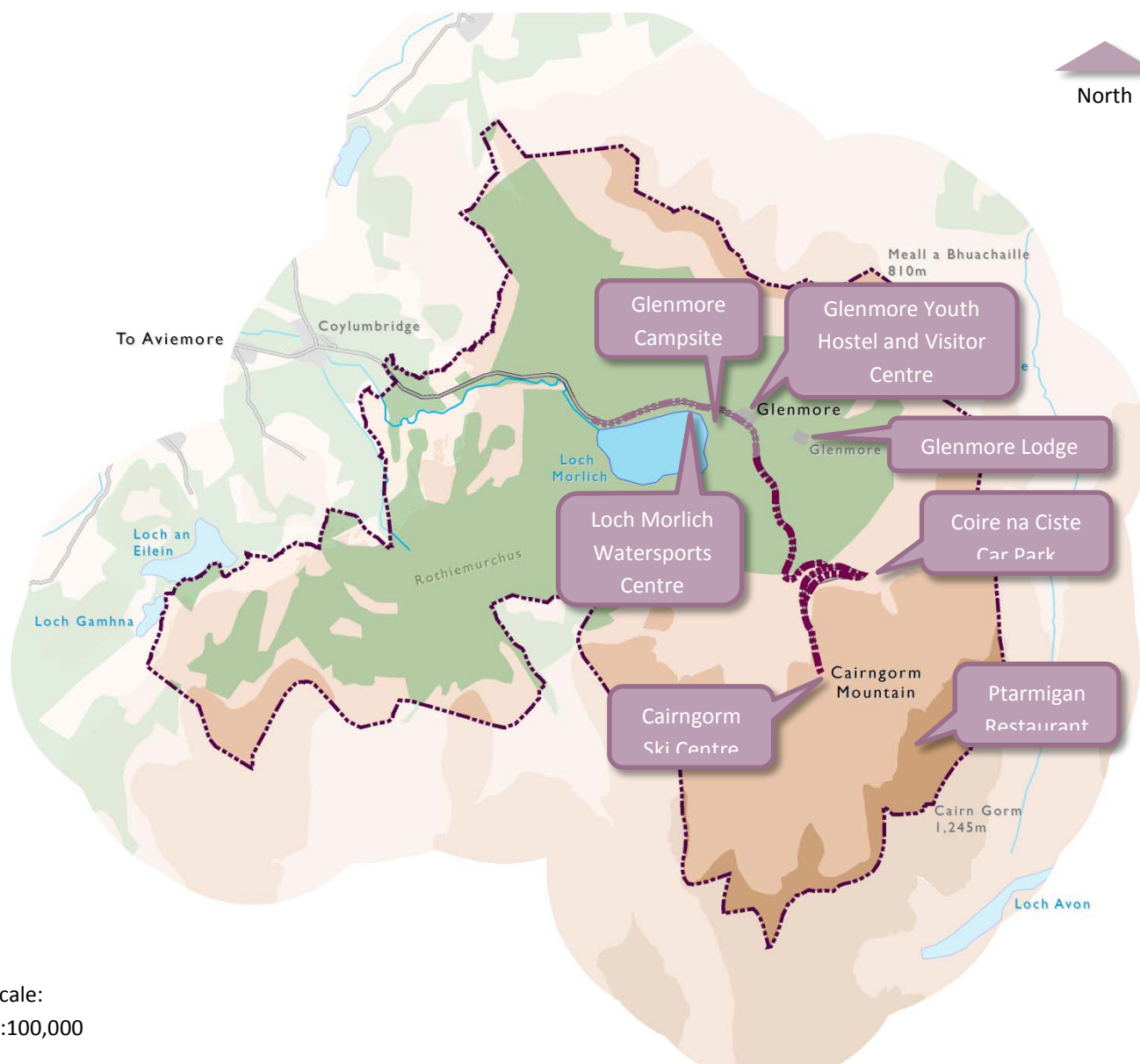




Figure 6. Sites identified for visitor infrastructure improvements

Indicative links:

-  Glenmore / Cairngorm Mountain Cycle link
-  Glenmore to Loch-side link path

Scale:
1:100,000

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Implementation

The Partnership will establish project teams to deliver the actions, drawing on the experience of other partners, on-site businesses and neighbours as appropriate. The Partnership will report on progress of the overall programme on an annual basis. Implementation for many actions depends on funding being secured and partners will work together to identify resources to deliver actions and use the strategy in making the case for investment in this area.

Delivery will be co-ordinated through the following project structure:

Cairngorm & Glenmore Partnership Programme Partnership Board & Project Team <i>CNPA, FES, HIE, SNH, Highland Council</i>		
Cairngorm & Glenmore Transport Working Group: <i>Highland Council, HITRANS, Natural Retreats, FES, CNPA</i>	Cairngorm & Glenmore Visitor Services Working Group: <i>HIE, FES, CNPA, SNH, Natural Retreats</i>	Cairngorm & Glenmore conservation: <i>Co-ordinated through existing partnerships and plans incl Cairngorms Nature, Capercaillie framework & FES Land Management Plan</i>
<i>Site specific delivery:</i>		
Cairngorm Mountain masterplan <i>Natural Retreats</i>	Cairngorm Estate Management Plan <i>(HIE)</i>	Glenmore Action Plan <i>FES</i>

Natural Retreats and Forest Enterprise Scotland will lead on developing long term spatial plans that set out the actions focused on improving the visitor experience, including facilities, at Cairngorm Mountain and Glenmore respectively. The aim is to complete these plans in the next 18 months, and their implementation will depend on partners securing funding.