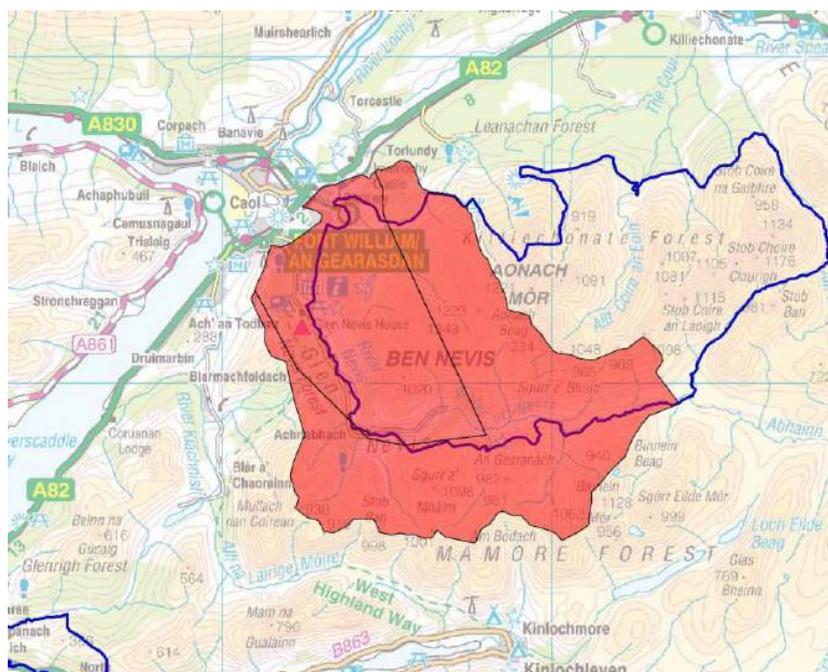




SUMMARY

Ben and Glen Nevis are nationally iconic areas for recreation. They attract hundreds of thousands of visitors as well as providing the setting for numerous events throughout the year. The area is also recognised for the international significance of its unique habitats and biodiversity. Much of the landscape area has been designated by the Scottish Government and the European Commission as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – see appendices for details. Ben Nevis is also nationally important for its geodiversity and biodiversity, being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – see appendices for details.

There is an inevitable and complex tension between recreation and conservation within the landscape. This project aims to proactively engage with the issue of human impacts. The project will do this through a process of dialogue, experimentation and evaluation. The project does not intend to start from the position of knowing the answers or having pre-determined solutions. Rather, it will focus on inclusive and collaborative dialogue: exchanging ideas, exploring opportunities and adopting an open approach in supporting the efforts of stakeholders. The Project will contribute towards securing the future of one of Scotland's most iconic natural assets.



Map of SSSI and SAC

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



Ben Nevis and the Glen suffer from significant, large scale human impacts every year. The extent of the problem is highlighted by the fact that repairing the lower section of the Ben Path alone will cost £1,000,000. As the highest mountain in the British Isles, Ben Nevis alone attracts in the region of one hundred and fifty thousand walkers annually. Litter, erosion and human waste are steady-state issues, yet numerous other global geo-tourism sites, particularly in America, have found ways to manage these challenges. An integrated, multi-partner strategy is required to find effective solutions, to investigate options and begin the slow journey of changing cultural attitudes/behaviours.

The project will explore the issues and practical ways to mitigate human impacts on the environment. At this stage it is proposed that the project will be structured around two core themes:

1. Events on Ben Nevis
2. Developing a Ben Nevis Badge Scheme for environmentally proactive groups and professional guides

As part of the Nevis Landscape Partnership HLF bid, an undertaking was made to re-route both the Half Ben hill race and the Ben Nevis hill race away from an area of sensitive and threatened habitat known colloquially as the Grassy Bank. This project will deliver a long-term solution, such that the Grassy Bank will not, in the future, be used as a racing line. This will reduce erosion and enhance the stability of this inherently unstable slope, which has already experienced landslides.



Erosion on the Grassy Bank, Ben Nevis. Courtesy of Alex Gillespie

The Nevis Partnership, The Highland Council and John Muir Trust all have a track record of working collaboratively with stakeholders from Snowdon and Scafell Pike, under the title of the Inter-Mountain Working Group.

The project will also focus on other events which impact the mountain – specifically the Three Peaks Challenges. The Nevis Partnership, The Highland Council and John Muir Trust all have a track record of working collaboratively with stakeholders from Snowdon and Scafell Pike,

under the title of the Inter-Mountain Working Group (see appendices). This project will allow a small budget to trial potential solutions on Ben Nevis.

This project recognises that the providers/organisers are both the experts and the driving force. The basic premise is to support and draw greater attention to the landscape champions we already have and spread 'good practice'. An environmentally proactive, core group, seen to be working together to look after Ben Nevis as part of a tangible scheme, could have wide reaching influence, encouraging many more to follow the example. One aspect of this project will be to recognise and promote activity providers and landscape champions with a recognised badge.

The project will also provide logistical support, training and information to assist major event organisers in reducing their impacts. This will be achieved through a collaborative process of dialogue. Networking and good practice events will be supported with the Partnership drawing in a range of exemplar case studies. Some specific issues such as localised erosion along with more general issues of litter and human waste are likely to require a long term effort. Flexibility, trial and error and a willingness to try new things are essential.

Budget	VAT
£15,000	£3,000

OBJECTIVES

- Events on Ben Nevis are managed in a way which safeguards the environment.
- People who visit the area as part of an organised event/activity are enthused and inspired to contribute to the area's conservation.
- To establish an agreed, long-term route for both the Half Ben and the Ben Nevis hill races.
- Businesses which benefit both directly and indirectly from Ben and Glen Nevis contribute to the area's conservation.
- To share good practice and promote those landscape Champions who proactively care for the environment.

KEY THEMES

Sustainable futures, minimal impact, social responsibility, environmental good practice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The long dog-leg made by the Ben Nevis path at the halfway lochan is generally slower than a direct line, cutting the corner on a line immediately south of the Red Burn. This uses a steep grassy slope, with a relatively uniform angle of approximately 30⁰, slightly convex in profile and covered with vegetation that forms one of the features of the Ben Nevis SAC – Species-rich grassland with mat grass in uplands. Long tradition of using this line has been reinforced with the repair work on the main path and a new line taking a much longer zigzag over to the halfway lochan before climbing in a rising traverse to the crossing of the Red Burn. The Grassy Bank now represents the quickest line for almost all elite runners, who prefer this direct line on softer substrate (offering relief from the hard stony surface of the path).

As a result of long-term race use and practice, several wear lines have appeared on the Grassy Bank. In places the vegetation mat has gone and the foot holes punch down through the soil for up to 30cm. This allows water to percolate into the soil and has the potential to increase the risk of landslide, particularly during or immediately after high intensity rainfall events. Landslides are visible on adjacent slopes of similar angle, aspect and elevation and there have been 2 substantial landslides actually on the Grassy Bank itself within the past 2-3 decades. These 2 landslides approach each other leaving only a narrow strip of undamaged ground between them where impacts from runners are concentrated. It is this area, at about

2/3 height on the Grassy Bank, where the slope is most likely to fail again, potentially with catastrophic consequences as an area of 2-3 Ha could be involved.

Removing running impacts from the slope has been a priority for the Ben Nevis SSSI/SAC management for several years now. SNH have made some progress in this by engaging with the Ben Nevis Race Committee and Lochaber Athletics Club (who run the Half Ben race) but further work needs to be done to bring all the stakeholders together and work out a long-term, sustainable solution.

How long this process will take is not clear. Informal meetings will take place to cover the 2014 races in the period December – April 2014. Following the 2014 races, which it is anticipated will take place over the existing route on the Grassy Bank, but with a clearly marked line to follow (as has been done in 2012 and 2013), a series of meetings will be set up involving all the stakeholders to look at possible solutions. A long-term, sustainable solution will be found by 2016 and a proper process put in place to allow any on-going issues to be addressed at the earliest opportunity. Where there is difficulty aligning the needs of all the partners, Scottish Athletics, who licence both races, will have a role to play as intermediaries.

CONSTRAINTS

The area in question lies within the Ben Nevis SSSI/SAC and contains qualifying habitats (SAC). The area is owned by Rio Tinto Alcan (lower part) and JMT (upper part).

DELIVERABLE OUTPUTS

1. New race-line agreed and established by 2016. Consultation and management process formally identified and in place for future problems
2. Ben Nevis Badge Scheme and environmentally proactive businesses
3. Area of Ben Nevis SSSI/SAC where action will reduce erosion and impacts from recreation:
 - 6km of the Ben Path and adjacent habitat
 - 3 hectares of highly sensitive slope – the “grassy bank”
 - 5 hectares of summit plateau
 - 100 hectares of north face climbing areas
4. 4 environmental good practice events
5. 3 surveys

PROPOSAL –BEN NEVIS BADGING SCHEME

INTRODUCTION

During key periods in the year, visitor numbers and impacts ‘spike’, with serious environmental consequences and visual degradation of a National Scenic Area, SSSI and SAC. Litter, erosion and human waste are steady-state issues.

The exemplary work already carried out by many of the outdoor providers and some event organisers does have the potential to influence further afield and with greater impact. The area’s Mountain Leaders and Guides are internationally renowned, respected both by the public and by the wider outdoor industry. The prestige of local providers is equally matched by the iconic status of Ben Nevis.

The campaign will communicate to and inspire a wide range of audiences, delivering powerful environmental messages. Visitors and local communities will develop a greater understanding of the value of mountain landscapes and the pressures they face. Furthermore they will be encouraged and inspired to reduce their impacts and take steps towards more positive

environmental behaviour. A unified, coherent strategy and message from all stakeholders will improve landscape quality, management practices and visitor experience.

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER MEETING: 17TH OCTOBER 2013

Attendees : Tristan Semple, Neil Pope, David Buckett, Dave Anderson, Andy Davidson, Alan Kimber, Jamie Bankhead, John Cuthbertson, Connor Holdsworth, Will Rowland, Max Hunter, Alan Halewood, Frazer Coupland, Peter Varley, Steve Taylor

The content, aims and structure of such a scheme were the topic of debate amongst those present at the meeting. The main messages arising from this initial meeting appear to be: the scheme must be clearer in its aims, avoiding confusion with existing systems; be simple to administrate and the focus must be on the mountain itself.

It was acknowledged that the small businesses represented did not contribute significantly to visitor impacts in relation to the scale of large charity events and general tourists. It was felt that many of the bigger picture issues (such as funding for path maintenance) would require a mixture of political lobbying, legislative review, visitor payback schemes, better signage and information. Many of these are currently being explored or planned by the Partners and Stakeholders. This scheme would sit as a component within a larger Minimal Impact Scheme. It was equally acknowledged that the status of Ben Nevis, and its international 'brand' value were key assets for the local business community, which could be capitalised on by the scheme. Equally, of the businesses represented, all expressed a certain sense of pride, care, responsibility and ownership of the mountain as an emotive and iconic landmark in their environment.

Whilst views differed on specific detail –there was a general consensus on the following principle: that any scheme would take the best of what the providers already do (litter picks, educate clients, volunteer) and make this go further and count for more. If the existing environmental activity and ethos of core outdoor providers becomes more formalised, and to some extent branded, it should bring promotional benefit to the members. Most importantly it will promote practical and positive environmental action on a local scale, but with a national message, in an accessible and coordinated format. The drive behind this being to inspire other, and particularly larger, commercial outfits to meet the challenge.

Main points emerging from the meeting:

- Avoid any confusion/competition with existing schemes
- Acknowledge the commitment, effort and pride already demonstrated
- Have no relation to qualification frameworks, remits or health and safety – these are all firmly covered by existing schemes, governing bodies and legislation
- The badge is only about positive environmental action
- Be simple
- Be local
- Only relate to Ben Nevis
- Bring tangible benefits to the membership
- Bring tangible benefits to the mountain
- Be owned by the membership
- Maximise the national 'brand' value of Ben Nevis for those local operators within the tourism sector that actively care for the mountain
- Develop a supportive network

OBJECTIVES OF THE BEN NEVIS BADGE SCHEME

- To promote environmentally proactive outdoor providers in the area
- To mitigate negative human impact on the local environment
- To protect and conserve the unique landscape character of Scotland's most famous and iconic mountain area
- To develop the local economy in a sustainable way
- To encourage responsible access and leave no trace ethics
- To increase visitor knowledge regards their impacts and ecological sensitivity
- To provide an example of best-practice in sustainable nature-based tourism
- To support community participation in conservation and visitor management

BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

Ben Nevis is an international Scottish icon. As the highest mountain in the British Isles it has deep cultural and environmental significance - far beyond the shores of Scotland. The project will leverage this to the benefit of the landscape and its local champions.

As a 'brand' Ben Nevis holds international value and provides the bedrock of a vibrant tourism economy in the Lochaber region. The project aims to capitalise on the charismatic pull of Ben Nevis, while meeting key objectives of a diversity of organisations, agencies and communities with a stake in the area. The project will deliver practical conservation solutions on the ground and educational activities that will engage tens of thousands of people with Scotland's natural heritage. Through this process, it will build the social capital necessary to sustain management of the land long after initial investment.

In essence the core benefits are increased recognition and national profile for the additional effort, care and pride you take in your work.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

A communications project officer in the Nevis Landscape Partnership (over a 4-5 year period) will promote the positive environmental care of the mountain and the importance of the membership. Potential outputs:

- A nationally recognised badge
- Promotion and recognition of members as landscape champions
- Quarterly news articles in press and social media platforms
- Photo journalism and articles for national magazines reporting on the project and promoting the members
- Promote through local business networks, the Natural Capital Community, Partner's websites, and OCUK with a dedicated page on the Nevis Website.
- Promote and represent at the Mountain Festival, Wild Lochaber Festival and other events
- Promote through national agencies and governing bodies

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

- Access free training (wide range of CPD and accredited modules available)
- NLP will support members in engage new audiences and clients at the Festivals
- Develop a wider network (Natural Capital Community) with accommodation and other tourism service providers to learn about each other and self-promote those local organisations which actively contribute to looking after the mountain
- A range of suggestions were offered as to how the scheme might run and what it should and should not include. These contributions have been compiled into the option presented below.

PROPOSED OUTLINE

Membership of the badge/scheme will depend upon demonstrating the following:

THEME	ACTION	MEASURE
Litter	Ensure all clients collect litter whilst on the trail and drop no litter. Scheme to provide biodegradable bags.	Digital photos at the end of each walk evidencing the collected litter. These collated and then sent to the NLP project officer monthly/quarterly/ Annually.
Education	Provide a Ben Nevis environmental brief to clients (details to be developed by the membership and with consultation), which might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave no trace • Annual impacts on the mountain • Cost of path maintenance • Number of visitors • Litter and the impacts of climate/altitude on biodegradation • Toilets and associated ecological, visual and health impacts • Lack of financial resource – not a National Park, we need visitors to give something back 	A self-declared ethos perhaps stated on website. Maybe a best practice evening event once a year where members exchange knowledge.
Visitor Input	Request all clients make a donation to Friends of Nevis - through a gift aid section in their online booking process Encourage clients to volunteer at one of the conservation days that Friends of Nevis runs.	Section in booking form or on Website. Advertise FoN events on their websites and blogs
Provider Contributions	Members attend a one/two day Mountain Access & Path Maintenance training course specifically designed for mountain leaders, instructors and guides (exemption available)– this means tasks like clearing cross drains etc can be confidently handled whilst guiding clients on the mountain in the future and this additional knowledge can be cascaded to the clients.	Attendance on at least one path maintenance training day – specially developed for mountain guides and recognised as CPD by governing Bodies

FURTHER ACTION

1. This proposal is with the stakeholders for comment. Once comments are collated I will send a more detailed outline to all local providers.
2. A secondary meeting – and establishment of a steering group.
3. Details will then be agreed by the steering group
4. The final scheme outline will then go to vote
5. If sufficient numbers support it, it will go into a development phase. A contract will be tendered to develop the look, logo, environmental code and briefing notes, strapline, webpage and initial promotional material

6. Promotional and educational activity
7. A cleaner and greener Ben Nevis

OUTPUT INDICATORS AND TARGETS

Landoned permission and SNH consent given unconditionally from 2016 onwards.
Formally agreed plan in place by 2019.

OUTCOMES

- The Ben Nevis races are secured in the long-term, with agreed routes that minimise erosion and meet the needs of the designated site, the land owners and the race event organisers.
- Event organisers and activity providers who use Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis are part of a nationally recognised scheme which protects the local environment and promotes them as Landscape Champions.
- Better informed visitors who embrace a sense of responsibility for the environment and an understanding of the sensitivity of mountain ecosystems.

ACTIVITIES AND TIMETABLE

Aug 2014- Advertise the intentions of the project and invite involvement
 Aug 2014- Online public/stakeholder survey
 Aug 2014 - Establish base-line data methodology for measuring range of impacts
 Sep 2014 – Stage 1 Impact Analysis Survey
 Oct 2014 - Initial stakeholder consultation/meeting –
 Nov 2014 – Form Focus Groups and Steering Group
 Nov 2014 – Designs for Badge Scheme
 Nov 2014 – Draft version of Erosion and Impacts Action Plan
 Dec 2015 – Proposals disseminated to all Stakeholders
 Feb 2015 – Steering Group meeting – Review/revise
 Feb 2015 - Focus Group Consultation
 Mar 2015 – Steering Group Meeting – approve Action Plan and agree trial actions
 Apr-Oct 2015 – Phase one trial period – race re-route, training, badge scheme, dissemination, promotion of messages/badge,
 Oct 2015 – Stakeholder Consultation
 Nov 2015 – Steering Group Review/Revisions
 Jan 2016 – 2nd phase proposals disseminated
 Mar 2016 – Steering Group meeting – Agree phase 2
 Apr-Oct 2016 – Phase two trail period
 Nov 2016 – Stakeholder Consultation
 Dec 2016 - Steering Group – Future sustainability/legacy
 Jan 2016 – phase 3

EVIDENCE, REVIEW AND REPORTING

The project will be reviewed regularly as per the timetable above.

Measuring quantities of litter accumulated on the summit of Ben Nevis is already undertaken by John Muir Trust. This can be built upon to develop more robust data.

3 annual surveys of key sites.

The process, proposals and phases will be disseminated to all stakeholders and the public as per the timetable above. Stakeholders will be included in annual reviews.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

As is demonstrated throughout the project brief, this project is fundamentally focused on reducing impacts to natural heritage.

BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNICATION

Landscape Character

Habitat & Biodiversity

Local community and groups

Activity providers and event organisers

Schools & students through education activities

Conservation organisations and national charities

Stake holders

Local economy through enhanced landscape character and developing an environmentally responsible reputation for the area

WIDER CONTEXT

The scale of environmental impacts from tourism, recreation and events requires a complex and multi-stakeholder response. Many other projects within the LP scheme tackle specific environmental issues and mitigate visitor impacts through infrastructure, interpretation, conservation, education, public engagement and training. The purpose of this project is to harness the pride and professionalism which is in abundance in the area's activity providers and event organisers.

PROJECT BUY-IN

The concept of a Ben Nevis Badge Scheme for environmentally proactive outdoor professionals has already been approved in principle (by a limited number of local providers) after a consultation process.

Three Peaks Charities event providers have been contacted and many are keen to be part of a scheme to reduce their environmental impacts.

Ongoing talks with the Ben Nevis Race Association and the Lochaber Athletics Club have also been positive.

The Nevis Partnership, The Highland Council and John Muir Trust all have a track record of working collaboratively with stakeholders from Snowdon and Scafell Pike, under the title of the Inter-Mountain Working Group.

PROJECT LEAD

Project lead will be SNH in conjunction with the NLP Scheme Manager.

PARTNERS / CONTRACTORS ETC.

Partners working on this project include:

Local Activity Providers

Event Organisers and Charities

The Highland Council

Rio Tinto Alcan (Bidwells)

John Muir Trust

Ben Nevis Race Committee

Lochaber Athletics Club committee

Scottish Athletics

Mountaineering Council of Scotland

Project Development

The first stage application consisted many separate projects and budgets focusing on specific elements, species, habitats and locations. During the development phase the Partnership

has established a broader, landscape-scale approach to conservation and future-proofing the heritage of the area.

The Consultation Process (see appendices) identified that the greatest single issue confronting the area's heritage is the scale of impacts from recreation and tourism. The Partnership, in recognising this, have developed a more focused and proactive project to engage with the issue.

This approach encourages and provides greater opportunities for partnership involvement. It also targets more resources more robustly across interconnected issues rather than many fragmented efforts. By contributing to a wider project, as members of a project steering group, the partners form a community with a common focus and a new platform for sharing ideas, concerns and best practice. Each individual is thus an integral and valued part of something larger yet tangible and clearly identifiable. Furthermore, this ensures that no expert knowledge is deployed in isolation or kept to a narrow focus, but rather informs a broader, landscape-scale perspective.

By having one core project cluster rather than a raft of separate projects, the public and other organisations can more easily grasp what the Partnership is doing. Many of the outcomes of the landscape partnership hinge on public engagement, and for this to be successful, it is vital that we have clear and easily understood messages. Promotion of the key messages surrounding 'leave no trace', 'minimal impact' and 'responsible access' benefit from a more coherent project image which the public can easily comprehend and identify with.

PERMISSIONS AND COMPLIANCE

The Highland Council require organised groups to book their event in advance.

Permissions are required each year for the races to take place; these come from the 2 landowners in question, RTA and JMT. To date permissions have always been forthcoming.

Consent is also required for these races to take place on Ben Nevis SSSI/SAC, which has an Operation Requiring Consent for "Recreational activity likely to cause damage".

LEGACY AND MAINTENANCE

Secure long-term future of 2 historic races on Ben Nevis.

Formation of Landscape Champions

Nationally recognised Ben Nevis Badge as an environmental conservationscheme

RISKS AND RISK MITIGATION

The main risk facing this project is that key organisations do not engage collaboratively with the process and ideas. This risk will be reduced through the sensitive handling of relationships by NLP staff – encouraging a process focused journey of dialogue and experimentation. Avoidance of blame and recognition of people's value to the process are essential.

