

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP: PROGRESS REPORT

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(Local Plan/Policy)**

Purpose

This aim of this report is to deliver the first progress report to the CNPA Board on the Local Plan Working Group.

Recommendations

- The Board supports the continued development of the Local Plan Working Group, towards a plan which will deliver sustainable development across the park; a plan which will be clear and concise, with the full backing of the Park's communities.

Executive Summary

The Local Plan Working Group has met 4 times since the 6th November 2003, in which time a core of stakeholders has been established to steer and guide the statutory process towards the public consultations stages; at this point the 24 Community Councils within the Park will become fully involved in the plan's preparation and content.

The Group is currently considering the plan's timetable, project plan, content, methodology, consultation & participation processes, policy issues and overall vision.

LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP: PROGRESS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the statutory planning functions of the CNPA is to produce a Local Plan to provide a detailed framework for land-use planning within the Park; the object of this Working Group is to monitor and steer the process and progress of the plan.
2. The group meets every four weeks, on the Thursday before a Board Meeting. An early decision was made that the group should be formed by a nucleus of the core stakeholders in the planning process, which has defined and statutory procedures. As the plan develops, other stakeholders and bodies with an interest will become involved, and the consultation process will be taken out to the Community Councils who will play a major part in the plan's formation and content.
3. Peter Argyle was elected as Chairman, Bruce Luffman as Vice-chair.

BACKGROUND

4. The Park area covers the territory of four Local Authorities (Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus), all of whom have existing structure and local plans in place. Until the CNP develops its own Local Plan, it must use the four existing sets of plans as relevant to the location of an emerging issue or planning application. This immediately sets up the issue of inconsistency of policy approach across the 4 areas; in the short term, until the CNP Local Plan can be developed, those topics which require urgent policy action will be addressed by Interim Planning Policies or Guidance. The first issue to be addressed by such is renewable energy; telecommunications and vehicle hill tracks are currently being formulated.
5. The four structure plans are all relatively up-to-date, with adoption from April 2000 to October 2002. Angus and Morayshire have reasonably up-to-date local plans, although the recommended lifespan of a Local Plan is 5 years (SPP1: The Planning System, states that Local Plans should be reviewed and revised within 5 years of the plan being adopted; by this guidance the B&S Local Plan is seriously out of date). Morayshire are already reviewing and monitoring their plan, with annual reports. Aberdeenshire Local Plan was started in 1998 and is currently heading for a Public Inquiry (starting May 2004); the earliest that the plan could be adopted would be autumn 2004. Badenoch and Strathspey is the most problematic plan, covering as it does over two thirds of the Park's population, and being severely out-of-date (although adopted in 1997 it was actually begun in the early 1990's).

Chart of development plan adoption/progress:

Local Authority	Structure Plan adoption date	Local Plan adoption date
Highland Council	March 2001	Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan Sept. 1997 Aviemore North Development Brief Feb. 2000
Morayshire Council	*April 2000	*April 2000
Aberdeenshire Council	North East Scotland together: Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016: June 2002	Finalised Draft August 2002; Inquiry to run from May 2004
Angus Council	Dundee & Angus Structure Plan 2001-2016. Oct. 2002	Angus Local Plan Nov. 2000 (currently under review)

* *Morayshire adopted the Structure and Local Plans jointly as their 'Development Plan'.*

6. The CNPA will not be developing a new Structure Plan; *Scottish Planning Policy 1: The Planning System*, notes in section 30 that “For national park areas the National Park Plan will provide a strategic context for development plans”. While the Park Plan and Local Plan are being developed, the existing development plans will continue to provide the planning framework.

MEMBERS

7. There are 6 Board Members on the Working Group: Peter Argyle, Duncan Bryden, Basil Dunlop, Douglass Glass, Bruce Luffman and Sue Walker.
8. **External Members.** The following external members have joined the Group:
- Maggie Bochel Highland Council (Development Planning)
 - Andrew Caruthers Aberdeenshire Council (Development Planning)
 - Martin Wanless Moray Council (Development Planning)

 - David Bale NH
 - Nic Bullivant Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
 - Jim Mackay SEPA
 - Mairi Ross Cairngorms Housing Forum
 - Alex Stewart Scottish Water.
9. **Angus Council** do not have the resources to attend the meetings, but would do so if specifically required; Alex Anderson, Director of Planning & Transport, is kept in touch via the minutes and papers.
10. Perth & Kinross Council also participate in the Group; planning issues rarely stop at boundaries and it is vital to foster and maintain good working relationships with the neighbouring authority, and any other organisations who

- have an involvement in and around the Park.
11. Other groups and organisations, such as the LECs and Forestry Commission, will be invited to specific meetings to be consulted/give their input.
 12. Nic Bullivant reports to the Community Councils group, but they will all become more directly involved as the consultation process develops; see section 7.2.

INTERIM PLANNING POLICIES

13. The Working Group also considers the need for Interim Planning Policies and Supplementary Guidance. Seven issues were identified in Planning Committee Paper 7 21/11/03: housing in the countryside, renewable energy, vehicle hill tracks, telecommunications, design and siting of development in the countryside, mineral extraction and conservation areas/listed buildings.
14. The renewable energy paper has gone before Committee and is now out for consultation; telecoms and vehicle hill tracks have been before committee and are now being readied for consultation.

ISSUES COVERED SO FAR

15. A draft Project Plan and timetable is currently under development; this sets out the methodology, vision and programme for the plan.
16. The consultation process, and how to successfully engage with communities, is a central issue to the whole process; the park area has a complex history of consultation exercises and experience which we can hopefully tap into.
17. Planning Aid: Planning Aid for Scotland is a registered charity who work to help people access and understand the planning system; they are currently developing a 'Planning for People' project whereby they provide training for community groups in 'areas of change' so that they can engage more successfully with the planning process. We have been successful in applying to be one of their pilot areas, and will shortly be discussing how their programme can complement the community consultation.
18. The Wester Ross Local Plan has been discussed in great detail, and will be used as a model for the CNP Local Plan; Maggie Bochel, Working Group member for Highland Council, also happens to be the project lead for the Wester Ross Plan. Traditionally, local plans can take several years to develop to a finalised draft, following which there will be an inquiry and eventually it is adopted by the authority (by which time it will already be getting out-of-date). The Wester Ross Local Plan, which is currently in mid-development, is a pilot-study which has been encouraged by the Scottish Executive; it aims to streamline and 'fast-track' the Local Plan process and end up with a more concise and user-friendly document. These are aims which the CNP Local Plan will try to emulate; to a large extent we are at a time in planning where the whole system is being

reviewed and updated, and we have the opportunity to ‘break-the-mould’ and create something new and dynamic.

THE CNP LOCAL PLAN

19. While the CNP Local Plan must follow national guidance and procedures, central to the ethos and policies of the plan will be the four aims of the park. The designation as a National Park takes the issues facing an already fragile area and in many cases makes them more acute; the following are some key issues which the Working Group is currently considering.
20. The single most important issue is likely to be **housing**; both the need for new development sites and the lack of **affordable housing**; some 30% of the housing stock within the park is already used as second homes/tourist accommodation. This leaves a huge deficit of properties within the housing market, and forces house-prices beyond the reach of local people. A growing problem for the area, which limits the growth of housing, is the state of **service infrastructure** provision ~ particularly waste-water drainage/sewerage treatment. The issue of affordable housing is likely to be the most emotive issue to emerge from the public consultation process, while housing developers can be expected to be the most vocal opponents to cautious zoning.
21. Settlement boundaries, relative to the above issues, will be the subject of revision and realignment; the challenge for the Local Plan is to maintain the character and form of the existing settlements, bearing in mind the environmental & landscape issues which will result from settlement expansion.
22. **Development in the countryside**, for housing but also for other sectors such as leisure and tourism, will be of increased significance within the National Park. The issue of how, and where, to allow housing in the countryside will be a very important issue. All types of rural proposals will need to have strict siting and design guidance to mitigate against landscape and environmental impacts.
23. Whether in settlements or rural areas, **sustainable economic and social development** is an aim of the Scottish National Parks and the second challenge for this Project Plan is to achieve this collectively with the other 3 aims; this will not be an easy challenge. Aviemore is a case in point where rapid commercial growth has led to long-term negative impacts; the redevelopment of the ‘resort-centre’ should hopefully improve the situation but the town is still growing at a swift rate and shows little sign of slowing down.
24. **Environmental issues** will become even more important as the National Park designation adds another layer of protection on one hand, and brings more visitors to the area on the other. The Local Plan will need to deliver on housing, social and economic issues, whilst also protecting and enhancing the natural (and cultural) heritage of the area.
25. **Peripheral issues/proposals**, beyond the park boundary, will also impact on the landscape and environment of the Park; a close working relationship will need

to be fostered and maintained with the five Local Authorities, and the issue clearly addressed within the Local Plan. The boundary is to a large extent an invisible/notional line and we will have to stress the impact that development 'beyond the line' will have on the Park.

26. **Sustainability:** central to the whole plan will be the ethos of sustainability, linked closely to the four aims of the Park.

CONSULTATION & EXISTING INITIATIVES

27. How to engage with communities will be the vital issue for the whole consultation; most local plan consultations can start with a 'blank canvas' but here in the Park there is a recent history of major consultations (such as the SNH 'Proposal for a National Park in the Cairngorms' consultation) and various Community Planning initiatives.
28. The SNH consultation was interesting in that it gave Community Councils the option (with training and funding) of managing their own consultation exercise; 20 opted to do so, 8 chose independently facilitated single meetings. How we actually do this ourselves is currently being discussed between staff (as there will be other consultations ~ Park Plan and Core Paths Network) going on at much the same time. We will likely offer each community the chance to nominate a facilitator(s) to help directly in organizing the events; between them and the Park Authority there will likely be a number of community workers, but these are currently being discussed at a strategic level.
29. Many communities have already undertaken some degree of Community Planning exercise; the third challenge for this Project Plan is how to pull all these disparate threads together within this new consultation exercise, to achieve a single common goal.
30. The first stage of the consultation process will be a leaflet delivered to every home within the Park, which will explain the planning and consultation processes, include a community profile for the local area, and have a questionnaire to assess the local planning issues. The questionnaire results will then inform the content of the first round of public meetings.
31. Greater community participation, and ownership of the final plan, is one of the biggest goals for the process; towards this end we will be employing a community worker to spearhead/organise the consultation process and work directly with Community Councils/Associations and their facilitators. An important part of the consultation process will be continuing dialogue and feedback; a dedicated Local Plan section on the CNPA website will help towards this, as well as direct community links.
32. Existing Initiatives: As well as Development Plans, Community Planning and similar projects, the Local Plan will need to link in with a large raft of existing strategies such as: existing housing strategies, housing association programmes (and waiting lists), Scottish Water development programmes (and Capital

Programmes for all service providers), forestry strategies, LBAP's, Area Waste Plans, Local Transport Strategies, environmental management strategies, Access Strategy.

PLAN FORMAT; INITIAL IDEAS

33. The aim for this Local Plan is to produce a reasonably concise document, easy to read and use, with policies relating directly to the key issues arising from the consultation. By the time the finalised draft is formulated, many of the general planning issues will have been covered by Interim Planning policies or Guidance; other issues which are adequately covered by National Planning guidance or other sources, will be referred to but not necessarily repeated. Clear and informative mapping will also be essential. The Plan will be modular in overall format, to facilitate easy reviewing & revising of particular issues/areas.
34. The Plan will have 4 sections:
- An introduction, vision statement and overall strategy (linking to Park Plan).
 - A policy section.
 - Community profiles & proposals maps (in 4 distinct geographic sections to match Local Authority areas).
 - Implementation, Monitoring & Action Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

35. The CNP Local Plan will be a constantly evolving and updated blueprint and guide to all land-use planning within the Park. The modular nature of the plan will allow a settlement (e.g. Tomintoul) to be amended if and when a significant opportunity/change presented itself, and was acceptable to all concerned.
36. Development control decisions, and community feedback, will provide the most direct means to monitor the implementation of the Plan. The modular nature of the document will allow required revisions to be made; an annual monitoring report will allow public scrutiny of the process and continued public dialogue/involvement.
37. The Action Plan will: describe the proposed action, allocate a timescale (short/medium/long), the resources required, who will deliver it, and the anticipated outcome.

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13th February 2004

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