

Main Issue 1

Over-arching development strategy

How and where should development happen in future?

Background

The settlements of the Cairngorms National Park are linked by a network of roads. The A9 trunk road runs around the western and northern edges of the Park, linking areas to the south and north as well as connecting to the A86 and A96 trunk roads. The Perth to Inverness rail line also links communities around the western and northern edges of the Park as well as providing connections beyond to both the north and south. Proposals to dual the A9 from Perth to Inverness, along with proposed upgrades to the Highland Main Line, will strengthen and improve these connections.

There are clear opportunities for growth and development within and around the existing settlements of the Park, both to maintain their status and to provide the new homes, businesses and other facilities that are needed to ensure their future sustainability.

However, most of the land outside the Park's main settlements is farmland, moorland, forestry, woodland and mountain that is valued for nature, recreation, and land management activities.

There is relatively little development here, and while some future development may be needed to support ongoing land management activities, the lack of development and the sense of wildness is one of the key characteristics which needs to be maintained in these areas.

The existing Local Development Plan therefore outlines an overall development strategy which focuses most development to the main settlements in the National Park – Aviemore, Ballater, Grantown-on-Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore – along with a proposed new settlement at An Camas Mòr. These settlements are referred to as 'strategic settlements'. The strategy also allows for some development in other 'intermediate' and 'rural' settlements in order to meet local needs, as well as permitting small-scale development which adds to existing groups of buildings in rural areas. Outside of these areas, the development strategy is more restrictive and aims to support the use of land for nature conservation, forestry/woodland expansion, agriculture, and recreation benefits (see Figure 1 on p14).



Figure 1: Development strategy diagram from the 2015 Local Development Plan



Preferred Option

Although we have identified some detailed questions about how best to accommodate housing growth around Aviemore (see Main Issue 4 B, p30), we think the overall development strategy of the current Local Development Plan still remains appropriate. It builds on the strengths of the area and its existing infrastructure, providing appropriate opportunities for growth whilst protecting and enhancing the National Park's unique natural environment. It is consistent with the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 and also accords with Scottish Planning Policy guidance, which requires spatial strategies in development plans to promote a sustainable pattern of development appropriate to the area.

Subject to our conclusions on Main Issue 4 B (p30) in respect of housing growth around Aviemore, and subject to a minor amendment to reclassify Dalwhinnie as a 'rural settlement', we therefore propose to retain this overall development strategy as the basis for the next Local Development Plan.

This would mean that most new development would continue to be focused on the main 'strategic' settlements in the National Park, with smaller-scale development being accommodated in the 'intermediate' and 'rural' settlements in order to meet local needs. Small-scale development which adds to existing groups of buildings in rural areas would also continue to be permitted. The remainder of the National Park would be subject to a more restrictive approach to development, which aims to support the use of land for conservation, forestry/woodland expansion, agriculture and recreation use.



Reasonable Alternative Options

We could promote an alternative development strategy by spreading development more evenly throughout the National Park. However, if we took this approach it would mean more new development taking place in smaller settlements. This is unlikely to make the best use of existing and proposed infrastructure and could have a negative impact on the unique character of the National Park. We do not think this would be appropriate. As a result, we do not think there is any reasonable alternative to the preferred approach outlined above.



Questions

- Do you agree that the overall development strategy of the current Local Development Plan remains appropriate, and that we should use this as the basis for the next Local Development Plan?