

Main Issue 6

Economic development



**How do we
ensure there are
sites for businesses?**

Background

The Cairngorms Economic Strategy 2015-2018 sets out the economic priorities for the Cairngorms National Park. Its overall aim is to 'Grow the economy of the Park by strengthening existing business sectors, supporting business start-ups and diversification, and increasing the number of workers employed in the Park'. The new Local Development Plan will play a key role in helping to deliver this aim.

Historically there have been difficulties in establishing the need and demand for commercial development land within the National Park. A study was undertaken in 2011 to attempt to better understand this, and although this study is now somewhat outdated its general conclusions remain relevant.

The study used a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews, along with an analysis of

historic take-up rates to try and identify future demand for business land within the Park. It identified a limited amount of demand for additional commercial and industrial land from existing business occupiers in the Park, but concluded that it is impossible to accurately determine demand from employers that might consider locating within the National Park if suitable business land was available.

Although it presented little empirical information on which to base land requirements, the study suggested that there may be a case to allocate commercial and industrial sites close to good transport links and centres of population to promote inward investment. The study also noted that there is anecdotal evidence of demand for small start-up business units that could be used as either office or light industrial accommodation.



Preferred Option

The current Local Development Plan identifies small amounts of new economic development land and also has flexible policies that would support economic development on unallocated sites in appropriate locations. In addition, it includes policies that protect existing strategic sites that are currently used for economic development and employment purposes from being redeveloped for alternative uses unless certain tests are met.

Our early engagement with stakeholders such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise confirm the importance of promoting diversity within the economy of the National Park and providing sufficient land that is suitable for commercial/industrial uses. The National Park Partnership Plan also sets out priority actions in relation to economic development and states that the next Local Development Plan should seek to identify new sites for business use and expansion.

Although it remains difficult to establish precise requirements for new economic development land, we think there is a case for allocating a limited number of additional sites in appropriate locations – particularly where these would be located close to good transport links and existing centres of population.

We have identified potential scope for new economic development land at Aviemore, Carr-Bridge, Dalwhinnie, Dinnet and Kincaig. As identified previously in Main Issue 3 (p20), a number of these sites will also help to take advantage of the potential for new inward investment resulting from the dualling of the A9. You can find more detail on these sites in the settlement section (p60).



Reasonable Alternative Options

Given the limited evidence on the need for new economic development land, it would be reasonable to continue to adopt the approach of the existing Local Development Plan. This option would continue to rely on flexible policies to support economic development on unallocated land in appropriate locations rather than identifying specific sites for business development in the Plan.

However, this existing approach has not delivered any significant level of employment development and there remains anecdotal evidence of unmet need for new business land. This option would also not meet the economic development priorities of the National Park Partnership Plan, which state that the Local Development Plan should seek to specifically identify new sites for business use.



Questions

- Do you agree that the new Local Development Plan should identify a limited number of new economic development sites?



Main Issue 7

Impacts on Natura designations



**How do we
protect the Park's
unique environment
alongside
development?**

Background

The Cairngorms National Park is a particularly important place for nature conservation. Around half of the Park is designated as being of European importance for nature and over a quarter of the UK's rare and threatened species are found here.

It is important that the Local Development Plan continues to ensure the protection of the National Park's unique environment. In particular, we must ensure that none of the proposals within the Plan will have an adverse effect on European protected sites and species.

We think the biggest conservation issues that the next Local Development Plan will need to address are:

- making sure the proposals in the Plan do not have an adverse impact on capercaillie populations, either directly or through indirect effects such as recreation disturbance; and
- making sure the proposals in the Plan do not reduce water quality and/or quantity in the rivers Spey and Dee as this could have a negative impact on freshwater pearl mussel populations.

Capercaillie numbers in Scotland have declined significantly from an estimated 20,000 birds in 1970 to fewer than 1120 birds in the winter survey of 2015/16. With the Strathspey area holding around 80% of the remaining capercaillie population, the National Park is crucial to the long term survival of the species in the UK.

New development can contribute to impacts on capercaillie, mainly through an increase in the numbers of people recreating in forests where capercaillie are present. However, the most significant activity from new development happens in the areas immediately around the development site. In most cases this means the areas around towns and villages where people already recreate, often on well-used paths and tracks that have been used by that community and visitors to the area for many years.

The Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework has been developed to provide a strategy for the conservation of capercaillie within the National Park.

A Phase I Report was published in January 2015, and this made a series of recommendations. In respect of development planning, the report recommended the following actions:

- continue a presumption against development in forest habitat that is or could be used by capercaillie;
- all new development adjacent to sensitive capercaillie sites should include tailored packages of mitigation including recreation management planning; and
- develop a co-ordinated and proportionate approach at a landscape scale to identifying, implementing and monitoring mitigation associated with new development.

A significant amount of work is now being undertaken to progress the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework, and the new Local Development Plan will play a key role in delivering its recommendations in relation to development planning.

The most significant change that would support the capercaillie population that uses the network of protected sites and connecting woodland of Badenoch and Strathspey would be to create significant areas of suitable woodland that is further from existing towns and villages. This would create suitable habitat that would have less disturbance from people and be more likely to support healthy populations of capercaillie across the network of sites.

Freshwater pearl mussel is identified as a species for targeted action within the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan and is one of the qualifying features for a number of the National Park's Special Areas of Conservation, including the rivers Spey and Dee. A recent survey of freshwater pearl mussel sites in the river Spey highlighted a 50% decline in the population. The reasons for this are still being investigated, but water quality and quantity is considered to play a significant role. In order to ensure the long term survival of the species, it is therefore important that new development does not lead to any reduction in water quality and/or quantity.



Preferred Option

We think the new Local Development Plan should support delivery of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework. In particular, we think the new Plan should include a revised and more co-ordinated approach to capercaillie mitigation and conservation measures on a landscape scale. We could do this by designing packages of measures to address the cumulative impacts of new development proposals around areas which are most sensitive for capercaillie and support the growth of good capercaillie habitat in the locations where it will have least disturbance from people. This would help us deliver the new development that our communities need and support the long term future of capercaillie populations.

We will work closely with Scottish Water and SEPA to ensure that there will be sufficient capacity to treat any waste water created by new development to the appropriate legal standards, taking particular account of freshwater pearl mussel, before it is released back into the river environment. We will also work with Scottish Water and SEPA to ensure that there will be sufficient capacity for the water abstraction levels needed to support future development.



Reasonable Alternative Options

For capercaillie, it would be reasonable to continue the existing Local Development Plan's approach, which requires individual development proposals to demonstrate that they will not have an adverse impact on capercaillie populations, and to include appropriate mitigation measures to address their own impacts. However, this approach lacks the co-ordination recommended by the Cairngorms Capercaillie Framework, does not address the existing issues of disturbance to capercaillie, and fails to provide long term certainty about suitable capercaillie habitat.

We do not think there is any reasonable alternative to the preferred approach set out above in relation to freshwater pearl mussel.



Questions

- Do you agree that the new Local Development Plan should include a more co-ordinated approach towards delivering wider packages of capercaillie mitigation and conservation measures?

