CNPA Supplementary Planning Guidance

CARBON EMISSIONS

Consultation draft February 2011

Planning in the Cairngorms National Park

Planning in the Cairngorms National Park is unique. It involves the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) working alongside the five local authorities which operate in the Park – Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray and Perth & Kinross.

Due to the expansion of the National Park in October 2010, to take in part of Perth and Kinross, different planning policies apply there.

The following paragraphs set out what planning policies apply in the National Park, and how planning applications will be dealt with.

Planning Policies

The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan, and this Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), cover the Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland and Moray parts of the National Park only. This SPG sets out detailed advice to help you meet the requirements of the policies in the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan. It is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the policies in the Local Plan and other relevant SPG.

The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan and this SPG does not cover the Perth & Kinross area of the Park. The Perth & Kinross Highland Area Local Plan, or the Perth & Kinross Eastern Area Local Plan, and any associated SPG, apply. Please see **www.pkc.gov.uk** for further information.

Planning Applications

All Planning applications submitted within the Cairngorms National Park must comply with the relevant Local Plan and SPG (see paragraphs above on planning policies for details).

Planning applications should be submitted to the relevant local authority in the normal manner. The local authority ensures all the necessary information is supplied and registers receipt of the application. The CNPA is informed by the local authority and has 21 days to decide whether to call-in the application. Only applications which are of general significance to the aims of the Park are called-in. The CNPA determines called-in applications. In instances where planning applications are not called-in, the local authority will determine the application.

1.0 Introduction

The planning system has a significant role in promoting development which helps to reduce Scotland's carbon footprint. New development should address the causes of climate change by minimising carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions.

This guidance provides information for applicants considering development which may directly or indirectly produce carbon emissions from general development within the Cairngorms National Park. Its aim is to ensure that new development demonstrates how it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

2.0 The purpose of this guidance

The guidance sets out how carbon emissions from general developments within the Cairngorms National Park will be taken into account. It will explain:

- what evidence should be gathered and what information should accompany any planning application;
- how the importance of carbon emissions for any proposed development should be assessed.

Types of Development that may fall within this guidance (this list is indicative and not exhaustive)

- Development located within carbon sinks – woodlands, wetlands, moorlands or areas of sensitive soils (all sizes).
- Hill tracks, mineral and peat extractions, infrastructure and other engineering works which may potentially have an impact on carbon emissions, ie affecting woodland, moorland, wetland or sensitive soils.
- Carbon capture and storage, hydropower schemes.

Note: this guidance does not cover development of the built environment including buildings – for further information on carbon emissions from buildings, please see the Cairngorms National Park Sustainable Design Guide.

Whilst preparing their proposals, applicants must consider all aspects of carbon emissions and any effect their development is likely to have on emissions of.

3.0 Carbon emissions

Carbon emissions are broadly defined as carbon dioxide (CO2) that enters the atmosphere as a result of human activity, especially the burning of carbon-based fuels. Carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas in the UK (methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases are others). These emissions are likely to have far-reaching, and potentially adverse changes on our climate. For further information see:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/climatechange

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

The need to tackle climate change, and in particular reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases that contribute to it, is a principal challenge of sustainable economic growth. Section 44 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires all public bodies to act:

- in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of the emissions targets in the Act;
- in the way best calculated to help deliver the Government's climate change adaptation programme; and
- in a way that it considers is most sustainable.

The Act sets a target of an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050, with an interim target of a 42% reduction by 2020.

4.0 Carbon sinks

Carbon sinks capture and store carbon in living (trees and other green vegetation) or non-living (soil, geological formations, oceans, wood products) reservoirs.

Peat bogs, soils and other types of vegetation including woodland effectively act as carbon sinks, storing carbon and preventing it from being released into the atmosphere. These deposits represent a substantial store of carbon, significant in terms of climate change - around 8 per cent of Scotland's emissions. To maximise this natural sequestration, climate friendly management practices, for example, investment in woodlands, are encouraged.

The disturbance of some soils, particularly peat, may lead to the release of stored carbon, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Where peat and other carbon rich soils are present, applicants should assess the likely effects associated with any development work.

This guidance requires that development such as hill tracks, mineral extraction or other engineering operations should avoid unnecessary disturbance of these areas unless sufficiently justified. If there are no alternative options available and development needs to take place in these areas, best practice should be adopted for all movement, storage, management and reinstatement.

The CNPA will encourage the sensitive management of all development, restoring degraded moorland, woodland and wetlands to create carbon sinks, where appropriate.

Moorland and peatland

Moorlands and peatlands cover more than half the area of the National Park. Blanket bogs are an extremely valuable carbon sink. While blanket bog covers extensive areas of the Park, peat accumulates very slowly under conditions of water-logging and is consequently colonised slowly by many species. Thus, once any damage or exploitation happens, it is a very slow and difficult process to restore this habitat. Therefore this sensitive habitat cannot be created or restored in the same way as others.

Commercial peat cutting raises particular environmental concerns, and new operations will not generally be acceptable in the National Park.

Development should be designed to avoid moorlands to minimise adverse impacts upon the hydrology, peat stability and the generation of waste peat.

Soil conservation

Organic soils store carbon, holding significantly more carbon than cultivated soils, and as such are a valuable resource in mitigating the impacts of climate change. The National Park is exceptional because of its unusually large extent of rare, undisturbed soils compared to other areas of Scotland; however these soils are particularly vulnerable. Developers should conserve these soils through sensitive management to ensure that the functioning structures are not lost.
Soils on development sites can be easily damaged during various stages of construction, leading to often substantial and irreversible loss of soil functionality and potential land contamination.

The Scottish Soil Framework describes key pressures on soils, particularly climate change, relevant policies to combat those threats, and identifies the future focus for soil protection, key soil outcomes, and actions across a range of sectors. For further information see: **www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/20145602/0**

Woodland

Forests and woodlands are an important resource in addressing climate change. The extensive forests of the National Park can make a significant contribution to the storage of carbon. Forests can help mitigate climate change by off-setting carbon emissions through carbon sequestration. Development should avoid unnecessarily removing trees and woodland.

5.0 Reducing carbon emissions

In order to reduce carbon emissions and help tackle climate change, mitigate against further impacts and promote the preservation and enhancement of carbon sinks, all development should:

- result in no net increase in carbon emissions in the National Park;
- avoid carbon sinks or significant sources of emissions;
- demonstrate a commitment to reducing carbon emissions, including incorporating site-wide solutions to contribute to tackling climate change; from initial design, construction methods to operation and maintenance;
- protect and enhance carbon sinks across the National Park including moorland, soils and woodland. This should be achieved through measures to conserve and improve, as well as reduce, any adverse impacts, through sensitive design and layout and construction of developments;
- demonstrate sound management of moorland and wetland, soil and woodland habitats to take account of carbon storage, alongside the biodiversity importance of the habitats;
- demonstrate potential site restoration and replanting strategies;
- show how the proposals will reduce waste of soil and soil carbon as by-products of site development; minimise soil disturbance, during construction and provide details of restoration;
- demonstrate the 'carbon balance' of the project (see Scottish Government guidance), and any impacts upon peat hydrology and peat stability;
- outline the pollution prevention and environmental management practices for the site during construction, operational and decommissioning stages of development.

Where soils, woodland or moorlands are developed justification for this should be provided within the submitted information. Impacts should be detailed within the application. Outline construction methods for works on peatlands should also be submitted.

For further information see: **www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-the-land/soils/carbon-activities/** and **www.sepa.org.uk/planning/**

Early pre-application discussions are recommended in the event that your development is likely to impact on carbon emissions.

Locking Carbon into the Soil and Vegetation - Practical Measures

- Protect peatland and moorland from damage by avoiding excavation, drainage, extraction and deforestation.
- Take action to control soil erosion.
- Retain and conserve semi-natural grasslands.
- Protect and restore wetlands including floodplain management, avoid drainage of wetlands and peatlands.

6.0 Provision of equivalent carbon emissions savings elsewhere

Where the planning authority agrees that there are substantive grounds to allow development that is likely to lead to significant carbon emissions and there are overriding demonstrable reasons to allow for this, alternative carbon offsetting provision may be

made. These may normally be secured by section 75 Legal Agreement and may involve offsetting or payment into an appropriate fund, which is used to reduce carbon emissions (if available). The amount of provision will be directly related to the requirement for the application site.

7.0 Further information

It is recommended that the following sources of advice are read in conjunction with this guidance note

Cairngorms National Park Authority
www.cairngorms.co.uk
Sustainable Design Guide

Scottish Natural Heritage
www.snh.gov.uk

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
www.sepa.org.uk