

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: AN INTERIM POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Purpose

This purpose of this paper is to seek the Board's endorsement of a proposed community development policy framework for the Authority, to be used as a basis for consultation with key stakeholders. Such a framework would set out an interim policy approach which, in due course, would be reviewed in the light of a broader Community Development Strategy for the Park.

Recommendations

- The Board is invited to endorse the proposed policy framework, as a basis for discussion with key stakeholder organisations.
- The Board is invited to agree to the development of a Community Development Strategy for the Park.
- The Board is invited to suggest any other key stakeholders who should be consulted with over the proposed policy framework and the development of a Cairngorms Community Development Strategy.

Executive Summary

It is proposed that, as part of the Park Plan, a Community Development Strategy is prepared for the Park. The principle purpose of such a strategy would be to contribute to achieving the fourth aim of the Park in a way that is integrated with the delivery of the other statutory aims and other Park strategies and policies.

The development of a Community Development Strategy will take time. In the meantime, it is important that there should not be a policy vacuum with regards to way in the CNPA approaches community development. A policy framework is therefore proposed which focuses upon communities of locality. A vision for local communities is proposed and the importance of local communities to the success of the Park is emphasised.

The proposed policy framework is based on principles of integration, participation, empowerment, representation, inclusion, communication and investment. There are two main objectives:

- Ensuring appropriate community involvement in the management of the Park, and
- Supporting local communities in identifying and addressing their priority needs and opportunities.

AN INTERIM POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Background

1. In January a research contract, 'Community Development in the Cairngorms', was completed by Scottish Participatory Initiatives and the Caledonia Centre for Social Development (see Appendix 1 for summary). This had been jointly commissioned by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), the Cairngorms Community Councils Group (as was), the Cairngorms LEADER+ programme, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, Angus Council and Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise. The research made a number of recommendations on how to take forward a strategic approach to community development and concluded that the CNPA should draw up and implement a community development strategy, which should be implemented through a Cairngorms Community Development Programme. The report also recommended that the Park Authority should work with its public sector partners and other stakeholders who play a role in community development.
2. As part of development of the Park Plan, it is therefore proposed that the Authority works with key external partners to establish a Community Development Strategy for the Park. In the meantime, it is proposed that the CNPA establishes an interim policy approach to community development, which can be refreshed once a broader Park Community Development Strategy is in place.
3. In developing an approach to community development, the Park Authority must give the clear message that it is an 'enabling' body. We are seeking to help communities to help themselves, not to do things for or to them. Creating an environment that supports active community development should be our objective and we will need to work with a variety of stakeholders to achieve this. Key amongst these stakeholders will be the local authorities, given their lead role within Community Planning.
4. It should not be forgotten, of course, that the Park Authority has already demonstrated a strong commitment to community development and participation, as is evidenced by initiatives such as the LEADER+ programme, grant assistance to the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils and the recent appointment of community facilitators to assist with consultation on the Local Plan.

Community Development - Definition and Focus

5. There are many definitions of community development. However, all are concerned with empowering people, establishing strong communities and helping to improve the quality of life and governance. The Community Development Foundation characterises community development as -

"A range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances" (www.cdf.org.uk).

Clearly then, a well thought through approach to community development will contribute towards the fourth statutory aim of the Park “*to promote the sustainable economic and social development of the areas communities*” and, particularly with respect to participation in decision-making, will also contribute towards the achievement of the other aims.

6. The word ‘community’ can be used in many ways. It is a useful distinction to think of communities of location and communities of interest. All people within the Park can be thought of as a single community. They can also be divided in many ways into smaller communities (eg east and west of the mountains, by electoral ward, parish, etc). At the local level most people feel that their community of location is the ‘settlement’ in which they live but, depending on the issue, this can expand to include other settlements (eg the community of upper Deeside or of Strathspey, etc). On the other hand there are communities of common interest or identity such as crofters, the business community, young people, or people with a disability, to name but a few groupings.
7. For the purposes of a policy approach to community development, it is important to consider the most appropriate way to work with communities. It is proposed that communities of location should be the focus, and more specifically Community Council/Community Association areas. There are 23 Community Council/Community Association areas wholly or partly within the Park. There are another four Community Council areas immediately outside the Park’s boundaries which were part of the Cairngorms Partnership Area and are still part of the Cairngorms Leader + area.
8. This is not to say that communities of interest are not important. Indeed, at the heart of the Park for All concept, is a recognition that the Park must cater for the needs of a wide variety of interest groups. However, active engagement with communities of interest is already becoming embedded within the CNPA’s working practices. How this engagement takes place and the objectives of the engagement will vary between specific policy areas but it is incumbent upon all staff that they identify and involve (as appropriate) those groups of stakeholders that have a legitimate interest in their work.

Vision

9. A proposed overall vision for local communities in the Park is for them to be:

“Active and thriving communities with a balanced population, that have adequate housing, services, skills and work options, where there is a good social and physical infrastructure and communications, opportunities to manage and/or own local assets, to be effectively represented and able to influence and shape the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.”

Many local communities already have a vision for their future and others may follow. This overall vision statement, as with the rest of this proposed policy framework, would be consulted upon and refined as necessary.

Principles

10. In developing an interim policy framework and, indeed, a Community Development Strategy for the Park, it is proposed that there be a number of guiding principles, as follows:
- **Integration** – to promote a community dimension across CNPA policies and strategies that recognises local communities as being fundamental to achieving all of the Park’s aims.
 - **Participation and Representation** – promoting local involvement and enabling communities to be effective partners and consultees
 - **Empowerment** – promoting confidence and individual and community capacity to initiate and lead local development and enable communities to act effectively and collectively on their own behalf
 - **Inclusion** - promoting **specific** measures to involve excluded groups
 - **Communication** - promoting a full range of opportunities for networking, information exchange and learning
 - **Investment** - promoting local social economy, community activity and identity

Objectives and Actions

11. The following two objectives outline the suggested scope of the CNPA’s approach to community development and identify broadly based actions, which would be developed in a more detail. Again, all of these proposed objectives and actions would be subject to consultation with key stakeholders.

Developing Community Involvement in the Management of the Park

12. There are many ways in which local views can be represented to the CNPA. The CNPA aspires to be an open and engaging organisation that takes account of the views of people who live and work in the Park and will ensure that the views of local communities are appropriately respected, while recognising that there may be diverse views within communities.

Action: *The CNPA will develop the level of participation by community interests in advisory groups, task groups and other groups, in a transparent and accountable way and promote mechanisms that enable local views to be heard.*

13. Increasingly policies have shifted from planning for communities to planning with or by communities. The CNPA will actively engage with communities over its statutory functions and ensure that the different parts of its organisation that might want to consult local communities, do so to a shared consistently high standard of best practice for participation and responsiveness.

Action: *The CNPA will develop standards and operating principles for community engagement, participation and consultation.*

14. Community councils are the lowest level of statutory democratic representation and represent the pattern of communities below the level of Park wards. They should be inclusive and representative of the views and interests of their communities. There is scope to improve the effectiveness of these bodies and build links between them, their constituencies and the Park Board.

Action: *The CNPA will forge links with and use Community Councils as a key channel through which the views of local communities are represented and as an initial point of reference or contact on matters of relevance.*

Action: *The CNPA will support measures to improve the effectiveness of the Park's Community Councils.*

15. To tackle its wide ranging communication needs the CNPA requires a well developed and co-ordinated approach to communication with the people who live and work in and around the Park and the local communities. The topography of the Cairngorms divides many communities from each other and can make communication difficult.

Action: *The CNPA will promote a range of approaches to communicate with the area's communities potentially including: ICT (Information Communication Technology) and media based option, newsletters, and develop local forums, networking opportunities and exchange visits to encourage greater communications between the area's communities*

Supporting Local Communities in Identifying and Addressing their Priority Needs and Opportunities

16. The CNPA is primarily an enabling organisation with limited capacity and resources. It shares a commitment to community development in the Cairngorms area with other bodies with related interest and responsibilities. To date support for community development in the Cairngorms has been fragmented and limited. The CNPA has a role in bringing a new and positive level of focus, co-ordination and support to community development.

Action: *The CNPA will initiate discussions with other bodies with a related interest and responsibility and facilitate a process to develop an integrated Community Development Strategy for the Park that reflects the area's diversity and local community needs.*

17. The CNPA recognises that most of the communities in and around the Park are at different stages of development and will design a programme to support community development that acknowledges the diversity of the area and that is flexible enough to match the needs of individual communities and sufficiently involve those communities immediately around the Park.

Action: *The CNPA will facilitate discussions to develop a community development programme and ensure that the programme is customised to suit the individual needs of the area's communities.*

18. In addition to their representative capacity, communities also increasingly need to have the ability to deliver community projects and local services themselves. There are a growing number of community development trusts and community businesses in the Park and an increasingly active local social economy that has the potential to contribute significantly towards achieving all the Park's aims. Meeting core costs is a significant issue for such bodies and diverts scarce funds from their local community development work.

Action: The CNPA will encourage and support the development of a network of community businesses or similar community development trusts within the National Park, so that communities can develop and implement projects to meet their local needs.

Action: The CNPA will also explore with others how to address the types of financial support required to develop the area's social economy.

Consultation on the Proposed Policy Framework

19. It is important to re-iterate that the suggested actions for the Authority to support community development are drawn from the commissioned research. If this proposed outline framework is approved by the Board, consultations will be held with key stakeholders to refine or change it as necessary. Key stakeholders include the Local Authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Local Enterprise Companies, Communities Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils and other community networks. Board members may wish to suggest additional stakeholders for consultation.

Recommendations

20. The Board is invited to -
- endorse the proposed policy framework, as a basis for discussion with key stakeholder organisations.
 - agree to the development of a Community Development Strategy for the Park.
 - suggest any other key stakeholders who should be consulted with over the proposed policy framework and the development of a Cairngorms Community Development Strategy.

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